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Mr Robert Mitchell  
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Dear Mr Mitchell

Ofsted survey inspection programme: History

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 15 and 16 May 2007 to inspect work in history.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject I was interested in the GCSE history pilot and the history department's response to Every Child Matters. The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, review of pupils' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good, although some aspects are better than that.

#### Achievement and standards

In Key Stages 3 and 4, standards are average but students make good and sometimes outstanding progress. In the sixth form, standards are slightly above average and, again, progress is good and sometimes outstanding.

- In Key Stage 3, students' standards in history when they start at college are often well below average. By the end of Key Stage 3, they are at least average and sometimes above. As a result, they make good progress. Girls generally do better than boys, something the department is addressing.
- In Key Stage 4, GCSE results in 2006 were average. The department has been working hard to improve standards including the introduction

of the GCSE pilot, new teaching strategies to make students more responsible for their own learning and optional revision classes. Inspection of current students' written and other work confirms the positive impact that these initiatives are having on both standards and progress. Standards are rising and students' progress is now good. The department has identified that it still needs to do more; for example, by giving more support to students on the grade C/D boundary.

- In the sixth form, overall, students' progress is good. Students obtain the full range of grades at AS and A-level with students generally having more success at A-level than AS. It is significant to note that students perform very well at the highest grades with over a third achieving grade A at A-level in 2006 compared to a quarter nationally.
- History contributes well to student's personal development. Behaviour is very good and formal sanctions rarely needed.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Students of all ages comment on teachers' enthusiasm and concern that they do as well as they can. They spoke of being very clear about objectives and what they have to do in lessons. They like the way teachers involve students in their own learning and that they do not just have to sit and listen to teachers talking. They appreciate the opportunities for local fieldwork because it makes history relevant for them. I confirm that I also saw all these characteristics during the inspection and that the introduction of the GCSE Pilot has helped develop these qualities.
- Assessment is used well to inform both teaching and learning. Teachers know students' strengths and weaknesses and adjust work accordingly. Students with learning difficulties are well supported extension work is provided for the gifted and talented. However more could be done to support this group of students. Students know how well they are doing and what to do to improve. Teachers provide detailed comments, orally and in writing, on how to do better.
- Teachers are always available to help and offer very useful, voluntary boosted classes at examination time.
- Students opting for the GCSE pilot very much appreciate the continuous assessment since many of them are nervous about examinations. Teachers also comment favourably on the option as a way of encouraging more pupils to opt for history.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The department has responded thoughtfully to a move to a two year Key Stage 3 and a three year Key Stage 4 curriculum. As an example

of its innovative and thoughtful approach, it has started the new GCSE pilot course, largely in response to its view of students' needs and interests and to help them do better.

- As already indicated, a very positive feature of the curriculum is the use of local history to help students' understanding by linking past and present. Good use is made of visits to various historical locations.
- The department is beginning to think about the implications of the new Key Stage 3 proposals from the QCA and the opportunities this will give for creating a curriculum that is even more linked to helping young people understand how the present came to be.

## Leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management is good.

- The department is well led by an energetic and thoughtful head. In turn, she is well supported by other members of the history department and the school's senior managers who have a strong commitment to the subject and its role in the curriculum.
- Staff have a good understanding of the department, its strengths and weaknesses and the performance of students. This information has been well-used to identify and support the sort of innovations already described in this letter.
- Throughout the school, existing self-evaluation procedures linked to development planning are now under review. The steps taken so far by the department as part of this review are sensible as are its future plans.

## The department's response to Every Child Matters

All the recent innovation in the department has been geared to improving students' knowledge and understanding and performance in historical skills. Through this, the department is successfully providing an historical and more general education that will help students in diverse ways both now and later in life. The lessons I attended on the Holocaust were very powerful examples of this.

Having said this, the department could go further in making the curriculum even more relevant to its students through the topics studied and their combination. As indicated earlier, when the new Key Stage 3 National Curriculum is published, this will provide a context for further development.

## Inclusion

Inclusion is good.

- The relative performance of girls and boys in Key Stage 3 is carefully monitored and successful strategies are in place to address this.

- The school tracks the progress of all pupils carefully and intervention is well tailored to identified needs.
- Good support is provided for pupils with learning difficulties.
- Gifted and talented pupils are well supported although there is scope for further development.
- Though the curriculum is good, there is scope for further improvement by offering courses which would more explicitly prepare students for life in a multicultural Britain.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- further development of departmental self-review and the translation of results into a self-evaluation document and development plan
- further improvement in provision for the gifted and talented
- further review of the curriculum to address issues of inclusion and relevance and the aspirations of the GCSE pilot.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop history in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority/Local Learning Skills Council. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term and made available to the team for the next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

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Ofsted Subject Adviser for History