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Mrs M Holman  
Headteacher  
Bishop Stopford School  
Headlands  
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Northamptonshire  
NN15 6BJ

Dear Mrs Holman

Ofsted survey inspection programme – History

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 15 and 16 June to look at work in history.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of history, the visit had a particular focus on information and communication technology (ICT).

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

History

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with you, one of the assistant headteachers, the head of faculty, discussions with pupils and other staff, a scrutiny of relevant documentation, an analysis of pupils' work and the observation of six lessons. Lessons in Year 11 and in the sixth form could not be observed because no history was being taught.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are outstanding.

- Pupils of all ages and abilities achieve extremely well because of the high quality of teaching and learning they experience. This enables them to make excellent progress.

- Pupils make excellent progress from Year 7 and attain standards in Year 9 which are higher than the national average. This is reflected in their work and in their unmoderated Year 9 SATs which are significantly higher than the reported average.
- Results in the GCSE examinations are outstanding. In 2006, 90% of pupils achieved grades A\*-C which is considerably higher than the national average and an improvement from 83% in 2005. Those who gained grades A\* and A stood at 44%. In 2007, all the coursework of pupils has been graded A or B and the school is anticipating that all pupils entered for the examination will achieve grades A\*-C. If successful, this will be a significant achievement.
- All students achieved a pass grade at A level in 2006. However, the proportion attaining grades A and B has increased from 49% in 2004 to 71% in 2006. The overall A level results were considerably higher than the national average.
- Pupils of all ages write well. They can write empathetically and for different audiences and purposes. The writing skills of the more able are of a high standard.

### Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are outstanding, enabling the pupils to make excellent progress.

- Lessons are thoroughly prepared and they are planned in detail.
- Lessons are characterised by an excellent range of activities, including work in pairs and groups, the use of ICT and role play, and the use of board games.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge which they use well to extend the pupils' knowledge and understanding. Questioning is incisive and helps the pupils to progress. Teachers have an excellent knowledge of examination requirements which they use well to help the pupils.
- Pupils are set appropriately challenging activities. As a result, they tackle the tasks set in a mature manner and have an excellent understanding of complex historical issues by the end of the lesson.
- The pace to the learning is brisk. Pupils make rapid progress in developing their historical knowledge, understanding and skills. They are taught particularly well about how to evaluate different sources and how to interpret these.
- Relationships between adults and pupils and between pupils are excellent. This fosters an excellent learning environment.
- Pupils have excellent attitudes to their learning. Their behaviour is impeccable. They regularly say how much they enjoy learning history.
- Assessment procedures are thorough. There is ongoing evaluation by teachers of the pupils' progress towards their predicted and target grades.

- Marking is regularly undertaken and indicates to pupils how they can improve their work.
- There is an excellent range of generic lesson plans. However, these are not always adapted by teachers for different classes.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

- There is excellent planning across all the ages to meet National Curriculum and examination requirements.
- Schemes of work for Key Stage 3 are supported by detailed lessons plans for each area of study.
- At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, examination syllabuses are supported extremely well by the development of detailed schemes of work. These focus well on how pupils can make the required progress, particularly in historical interpretation. There is an appropriate emphasis on developing extended writing skills.
- There are visits to a few places of historical interest. There is an annual trip to the First World War battlefields in Belgium for pupils in Year 9, while students in Year 12 visit the Southwell workhouse in Nottinghamshire.

### Leadership and management

Leadership and management are outstanding. They have inculcated excellent teaching and learning, and have enabled outstanding achievement and standards.

- The head of faculty has an excellent understanding of strengths and weaknesses in the subject. This is because of detailed evaluation of provision and taking decisive action to improve aspects.
- Feedback is regularly invited from learners and their parents and appropriate action taken when it needs to be. Excellent relationships have been established with parents through e-mail, phone calls and letters home. One parent commented: the "teaching of history is excellent. The teacher's enthusiasm is passed onto our child."
- Pupils value the skills of the teachers. One stated, "teachers teach us really well", while another said, "I have enjoyed looking at sources and finding information from them because it helps me understand facts."
- Departmental planning is thorough and there is an unrelenting focus on raising standards and improving pupils' progress. The planning reflects well the school's priorities.
- There is a strong team ethos within the department. Staff morale is high and staff are justifiably proud of what they have achieved for the pupils.

Subject issue: ICT

There is excellent use of ICT. The use of Power Point presentations is routine in lessons and teachers use these competently. The departmental resources bank has a very good range of Power Point presentations for use in different topics. Staff also makes very good use of the school's Intranet facilities. Pupils are encouraged to use their ICT skills in carrying out research at home or elsewhere in the school. A list of relevant websites has been drawn up for pupils to use.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is outstanding.

- The needs of pupils who are identified with learning difficulties and disabilities and those who are gifted and talented are met extremely well. Teachers are aware of their needs and plan appropriate activities for them.
- The lower attaining pupils are supported well by learning support assistants, who enable them to make rapid progress. Those who are gifted and talented are regularly set extension activities in lessons or for homework.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that generic lesson plans are routinely adapted to better meet the needs of different classes
- ensuring that pupils visit more places of historical interest.

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 and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Champak Chauhan  
Her Majesty's Inspector