

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk



17 July 2007

Miss Suzanne Richards  
Headteacher  
The Holt School  
Holt Lane  
Wokingham  
Berkshire  
RG41 1EE

Dear Miss Richards

Ofsted survey inspection programme: History

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 11 and 12 July 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 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 is judged to be good, although some aspects are outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Standards are above average and pupils of all ages make good progress.

- In Key Stages 3 and 4, standards are above average. In the sixth form, standards are average at AS level but rise to above average at A-level putting the school in the top 20% nationally.
- Pupils' make good progress in Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form. Data on the performance of pupils currently in Year 11 suggests that pupils' achievement will be significantly better than last year and also an improvement on the 'good' year of 2005. Gifted and talented pupils do well as do those with learning difficulties.
- These overall judgements hide variation in performance between pupils. For instance, some pupils do outstandingly well; for example, the knowledgeable and well-argued essay of a Year 12 student on Protestantism in the reign of Edward VI and similar high-quality essays

on the impact of evacuation in the UK in 1939/40 and the political strength of Hitler.

- Pupils' personal development is very good. Pupils' spiritual and moral development is clearly evident in their sensitivity to (and opinions on) issues such as the Holocaust, the suffragettes and fighting in the English civil war. Pupils' social development is very good as a result of working in groups in class and by their increasing awareness of political, social and economic issues.
- Pupils' attitudes to the subject are very good. They apply themselves well and cooperate well with each other in group work and with teachers. Behaviour is very good.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers are knowledgeable, passionate about their subject and are very keen for pupils to do well. Pupils recognise this and respond positively to the challenge. Pupils of all ages commented that staff are always available for help and advice and that this is very much appreciated.
- Lessons are very well planned and use computers, projection equipment and a whole range of other resources very effectively. Teaching styles vary but increasingly, learning is being made more active with pupils taking the initiative. Pupils strongly approve of this. However, there is scope for further development
- Assessment is very well used to support teaching and learning. The progress of pupils is very well tracked. Teaching is adjusted as a result. Pupils are kept well informed about their progress. When asked, they said that marking is very helpful and it is clear from their books that it has positive effect.
- The history department's section of the school internet is excellent and provides a highly useful means for staff and pupils to communicate with each other on history issues as well as providing helpful resources and links.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is based on a fairly formal interpretation of the National Curriculum. However, there are appropriate plans to revise it in the light of both the new Key Stage 3 and the Every Child Matters agenda aimed at making the curriculum more relevant. There is clearly potential for closer liaison with citizenship given the school's overall curriculum plans.
- Very good use is made of external visits and video conferencing and the department is active in the Comenius project.

## Quality of leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management is good with elements that are outstanding.

- The head of department has a very clear view of the strengths and weaknesses of the department. There is excellent use made of data although the school acknowledges that a weakness is the absence of base line entry information. The head of department has also been very successful in creating a team of teachers who share similar aims and vision.
- All staff deserve credit for their lively but careful approach to innovation in the subject particularly in relation to the curriculum and teaching and learning styles.

## The department's response to Every Child Matters

Much of what the department currently does is clearly linked to the future well-being of pupils. It is providing essential knowledge and skills which will be of considerable use to pupils in the future. Nevertheless, the department fully acknowledges that it can go further in making the curriculum more relevant to pupils, explaining more clearly the historical background to the world in which they live. The new Key Stage 3 National Curriculum will provide a context for this.

## Inclusion

Inclusion is good.

- The performance of all pupils is carefully monitored and teachers respond accordingly to identified needs.
- Gifted and talented pupils are well supported.
- The curriculum is good but in the forthcoming curriculum revision, there is scope for offering units which would more explicitly explore the histories of the different cultures represented in the UK.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- the development of the Key Stage 3 curriculum to address the new statutory requirements and to link history more explicitly to the present
- further development of teaching styles which encourage independent learning
- the introduction of base line assessment to aid in the identification of pupils' progress in Key Stage 3.

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. 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

Paul Armitage HMI  
Ofsted Subject Adviser for history