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Dr Davies  
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Dear Dr Davies

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history and the GCSE pilot

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 16 and 17 October 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 the GCSE pilot, and 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with the curriculum director for humanities and Personal, Social and Health Education, the head of the history department, discussions with pupils and other staff, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and the observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' achievement is good but their standards are well below average.

- Pupils' prior attainment when they enter school at age 11 is low. However, they make good progress in lessons and are developing well their historical knowledge, understanding and skills. Some, especially

the higher attainers, can competently evaluate sources and are developing well their awareness of the reliability of different sources.

- Recent results in the GCSE examinations have been well below the national average. The handful of students who have studied the subject at post-16 in the last two years have all attained a pass grade at A level; however, in 2007, these were not higher grades. Pupils' performance in their examinations reflects their low prior attainment and their weak skills in literacy.
- Pupils studying the GCSE pilot are making good progress. They are developing well their knowledge and understanding of life at the Southwell workhouse and of Sudbury Hall through the ages. Their written work shows good knowledge and understanding of everyday life in the workhouse and there is some competent evaluation of sources, including whether the novel 'Oliver Twist' accurately represents everyday life in a workhouse. Their work on Sudbury Hall shows clear understanding of the use of the Hall over many years.
- Pupils are well behaved and they enjoy studying history. Some are keen to respond in whole-class discussions and most maintain their concentration on the activities set.
- History is popular in the sixth form and numbers opting for the subject are rising.

### Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Lessons are planned in some detail. Learning objectives are explicitly identified and routinely shared with the pupils.
- Activities are well organised and managed. There is good work in pairs and small groups. Relationships are good.
- Teachers work hard in lessons and they use their good questioning skills well to enhance the pupils' knowledge and understanding. These skills are often used with stimulating source materials about the period being studied.
- Pupils are offered appropriate challenge and the learning is well paced. The teachers have appropriately high expectations of the pupils and constantly encourage them to do better.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced. It is enhanced by visits to places of historical interest and through the use of ICT.
- Schemes of work are detailed and contain appropriate guidance. The department is currently reviewing and rewriting the schemes on a rotating basis.

- Assessment procedures are being strengthened. More emphasis is being placed in using the available data to monitor and enhance pupils' progress.
- The pilot GCSE course is being developed well. It is perceived as relevant to the needs of the pupils and they enjoy studying it. Appropriate resources are being created and developed. The staff value the support from the local cluster meetings.

## Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good.

- The head of department leads the subject well. She and the curriculum director for the faculty have good knowledge and understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the subject. Their self-evaluation is accurate.
- Appropriate plans are in place to ensure that standards and provision in the subject improve. The subject has rightly identified, for example, that assessment and target-setting procedures need strengthening.
- The department benefits from a good and supportive ethos between the staff.

## Subject issue: ICT

There is good use of ICT within the subject.

- The department recently decided to invest in laptop trolleys. The laptops are used well by pupils for developing a range of skills, including word processing, downloading information from relevant websites and creating PowerPoint presentations. Some pupils are competent users of digital photography and incorporate this well into their work.
- There has been a strong emphasis recently on extending the use of ICT, including its use as a means of communicating with parents. The department is part of the faculty website and makes use of student and parent blogs, among other innovations. These are used as a vehicle for feedback but the response from parents has been disappointing and this is being re-examined.

## Inclusion

Inclusion is good.

- Appropriate guidance is provided to staff on meeting the needs of lower attainers and those who are gifted and talented.
- The needs of different groups of pupils are met largely through the setting arrangements. Teachers are aware of the prior attainment of pupils through a good range of data that is provided for them.

- Lessons have a range of suitable activities, including the use of group work, work in pairs and individual research. Teaching assistants work with identified pupils and offer them intensive support to enhance their progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- continuing the development of assessment procedures including the use of assessment information in everyday lesson planning
- extending and enhancing the pupils' skills in literacy.

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