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22 November 2007

Dr R Tetlow
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Dear Dr Tetlow

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 12 and 13 November 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 you and the head of the history department, discussions with pupils and other staff, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and the observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' achievement and standards are outstanding.

- Pupils make excellent progress over time. Younger pupils are developing well their knowledge and understanding of, for example, the Battle of Hastings. They are aware of different historical sources and can evaluate these well. Pupils can write well and extensively, for example about life in the trenches during the First World War.

- Older pupils in Key Stage 4 have an excellent understanding of developments in medicine through time, while students in Year 13 are developing an excellent understanding of how Mussolini used propaganda to bolster himself and his regime.
- Pupils are making excellent progress in the GCSE pilot. They have developed a very good understanding of the local heritage industry and how to improve amenities, for example in Sherwood Forest. Some exemplary work has also been undertaken in local history about the impact of the Industrial Revolution on the Derwent Valley.
- Results in the GCSE examinations are significantly higher than the national averages. In 2006, 88% attained grades A*-C and this increased to 94% in 2007. These are some of the best subject results in the school. Relatively high proportions attained A* and A grades.
- Students continue to attain well in the AS and A level examinations. Only two students out of 26 did not secure a pass grade in 2007 at AS level, while over one third gained grades A and B. All 16 students entered for A level passed in 2007 and over two thirds achieved grades A and B.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and they have excellent attitudes to their learning.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are outstanding.

- Teachers work hard. Relationships in lessons are excellent, leading to an excellent learning environment.
- Teachers have excellent knowledge of their subject and of examination requirements. They use this effectively to extend the pupils' historical knowledge, understanding and skills.
- Questioning is brisk and well paced. It consolidates and extends learning extremely well.
- Lessons are planned in detail to take account of the different abilities. The level of challenge is appropriate and lessons are well paced. Time is used extremely well.
- There is a thorough system of assessment and target-setting, especially for the pupils in Key Stage 3. Teachers have an in-depth understanding of the needs of individual pupils as a result. Pupils, in turn, are made aware of what knowledge and skills they need to improve. The teachers' marking ensures that the targets set are routinely evaluated. Older pupils' work is regularly marked and they are offered good feedback on how to improve it. Pupils value the marking and assessment system because they say it helps them to improve their work.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good, with outstanding features.

- The curriculum is broad, relevant and well balanced. Schemes of work are currently in the process of being reviewed and strengthened, especially at Key Stage 3 and at A-level.
- The curriculum is supplemented by a good range of enrichment activities, including visits to places of historical interest, both near and far and the use of outside speakers such as local historians. As one pupil commented, 'There's something for everybody in history.'
- There is an excellent emphasis on the study of local history. Some excellent local history work is undertaken at Key Stage 4 through the in-depth study of the local Lumsdale Valley.
- The vocational GCSE is offering very good breadth to the history curriculum. Pupils say it is an excellent innovation; they enjoy studying local history and value the coursework element of the syllabus.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are outstanding.

- The department benefits from excellent leadership. The head of department leads the department extremely well. He is supported by a hard working team of staff who constantly strive to improve standards and provision for the pupils. This is exemplified by the introduction of the GCSE pilot. A lot of hard work has been invested by the staff in its introduction.
- The department has a very good understanding of its strengths and areas that need further development. However, it is modest and does not readily celebrate its outstanding successes.
- The head of department has not been fully involved in a formal cycle of regularly observing the lessons of the other three staff. However, this has recently been addressed.

Subject issue: ICT

The use of ICT within the subject is gradually developing. Some staff use PowerPoint presentations and others encourage the use of laptops by individual groups. Pupils are competent users of ICT and evidence of this was seen in their written work in the use of word processing. Pupils in Year 7 are also reported to be competent investigators of census data. However, the subject does not yet fully utilise the many and varied opportunities for developing the pupils' skills in ICT across the ages.

Inclusion

Inclusion is outstanding.

- Staff know the needs of individual pupils extremely well.
- The department is supported by a teaching assistant who works intensively with identified pupils. She enables them to make excellent progress.
- Teaching and learning approaches are suitably varied to ensure that the needs of all abilities are met.
- The close links with the Learning Support Department ensure that the needs of individual pupils are kept constantly under review.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included the need to:

- extend the use of ICT within history.

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