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10 December 2007

Mrs Hemsli
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Hemsli

Ofsted survey inspection programme - History

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 04 and 05 December 2007 to inspect work in history.

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: visits to three classes, interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation including examination results, and a review of a sample of students' work.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Standards are well above average and students' achievement is outstanding.

- In both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, students do very well in history. Key Stage 3 assessments by teachers, GCSE and A-level results are well above the national average. For example, in GCSE last summer, nearly 63% of students achieved an A* or A grade compared with a national figure of 32.6%. At A-level in 2007, 72% of students attained an A or B grade compared to 55% nationally.
- Students' personal development, encouraged by their studies in history, is also outstanding. Students have very clear views on a whole range of issues including the evolution of democracy, racism and human rights.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding.

- The quality of teaching is outstanding because teachers know their students very well and so are able to meet their needs effectively. There is a very good system for monitoring students' progress. This includes effective marking which gives clear guidance on how to improve. Students are given very clear targets.
- Teachers are well qualified and very enthusiastic about the subject. They pass this enthusiasm onto students who find lessons and other activities interesting and fun. All activities are well planned and their success frequently reviewed.
- The quality of learning is very high. Students' attitudes towards the subject are excellent. They are interested in the subject and work with enthusiasm. This was very clear in the lessons I attended and in the way in which students approach work in their exercise books. The quality of the latter including presentation of work is impressive.
- Students are self-motivating; often show initiative in researching for themselves; and respond well to the department's increasing emphasis on more independent learning.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

- The department delivers the current A-level and GCSE specifications expertly and is well advanced in its preparations for the new, revised A-level. GCSE and Key Stage 3 programmes are made innovative and exciting by the content selected and its delivery. In Key Stage 3, this involves interesting innovation; for example, the study of Imperial China, linked to Chinese students being the largest minority in the school.
- The department also links past with present very effectively; for example, the Gunpowder Plot related to 9/11; and Tudor and Civil War history linked to modern day issues of persecution and tolerance. In all this, the curriculum covers in appropriate measure and balance, knowledge, understanding and historical skills. Other skills are also very well developed; for example, literacy in all its forms.

Leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management is outstanding.

- The Head of Department is impressive in his knowledge and understanding, both of history and how to teach it. His colleagues

share the same characteristics. It is this drive linked to the excellent understanding of students which is at the heart of the department's success.

- There is excellent monitoring of students' progress and the members of the department work closely together providing good quality assurance of teaching.
- There is constant innovation both in what is taught and how it is taught. The department has also developed very effective links with neighbouring schools which have provided very helpful ideas and other support.
- There is very good cooperation with other departments in the school; for example, with Food Technology in the recent study (and experience) of American history and the Thanksgiving Supper.

The subject's response to Every Child Matters

The department is extremely alert to the Every Child Matters agenda and both the general approach to teaching and aspects of the curriculum reflect it. Meeting the needs of young people and preparing them for adult life is at the heart of the department's thinking and, consequently, much of what is taught about the past is linked to the present.

Inclusion

Inclusion is a clear priority not only for the department but for the school as a whole. Although the school is selective in its intake, there is a clear ability range and other elements of diversity amongst pupils. The department does well in identifying and responding to this diversity. Thus, for example, it does well for those who are deemed 'gifted and talented' and for those who, relatively speaking, are not so strong. Students from different ethnic groups do equally well.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed:

- there are no areas for improvement beyond those already identified in the department's development plan.

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 Specialist Adviser for History