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Dear Mr Hamer

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 21 and 22 January to look at work in history.

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

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 staff and students, a scrutiny of relevant documentation, an analysis of students' work, the observation of five lessons and attendance at the departmental meeting.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

#### Achievement and standards

Students' achievement is good and they attain GCSE results which are in line with national averages.

- Students make good progress and they are developing well their historical knowledge and understanding. Students in Year 7, for example, have good understanding of how the Romans improved public health and sanitation in parts of England. Other students in Key Stage 3 are developing their knowledge and understanding of the

Suffragettes, of the fight for civil rights in the USA and of aspects of the First World War.

- Students studying the pilot GCSE are making good progress. They can present well-balanced arguments about, for instance, whether Robin Hood existed or whether the Vikings were better at invading and raiding, rather than at settling.
- At all ages, students are evaluating historical sources well. They can comment on the reliability of sources and have a good appreciation of how these can be biased. They work with a good range of primary and secondary sources.
- Some students write well and accurately for their ages. However, others struggle with the correct use of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Some, including the lower attaining students, do not always write at length.
- Students' behaviour and their attitudes to learning are usually good or, occasionally, excellent.

### Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good with outstanding features.

- Lessons are planned in some detail and include a good range of teaching and learning activities. Students often work in small groups, in pairs or by themselves. The students value the diverse range of learning styles they are offered.
- Teachers have excellent knowledge of the subject and of examination requirements. They use this well in their questioning to extend the students' understanding and skills.
- The pace to the learning is good and, occasionally, excellent. This is because the brisk questioning and well-timed activities ensure that the students make rapid progress.
- Relationships are invariably good and classes are managed well, often with the good use of humour.
- The students' written work is regularly marked. Students in Key Stage 3 are given grades for effort and attainment, while those at Key Stage 4 are given an overall evaluative grade for each piece of written work marked. Teachers give constructive feedback to the students and show them how they can improve their work. The students value this.
- Although the teachers' lesson planning is detailed it does not routinely identify learning targets for the lower or higher attaining students.

### Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is broad, generally well balanced and it meets requirements. At Key Stage 4, the college offers two choices in the GCSE examinations: the traditional course and the pilot course which includes an emphasis on the heritage industry.

- Detailed and appropriate schemes of work support the various history units being studied. They provide good guidance to the teachers.
- The GCSE pilot course is being implemented well. Some hard work has gone into its introduction. The emphasis on the study of Robin Hood and local history is valued by the students and they enjoy learning these aspects. The teachers have gained more confidence about planning the course for the future and are developing a good awareness of how to better meet its requirements.
- The learning of older students is greatly enhanced by visits to places of historical interest. They visit, for instance, Nottingham and Sherwood Forest for their work in the GCSE pilot. They also visit the Beth Shalom Holocaust Memorial Centre at Laxton, near Newark. Younger students regularly attend the 'Horrible Histories' performances in Derby and Nottingham. Recently, 15 students from Year 8 produced a newspaper in their own time about the slave trade and modern day slavery. They entered this work for a national event and it was placed on the 'highly commended' list by the judges.

### Leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management is good.

- The head of department leads the subject well. She has a good understanding of strengths and weaknesses in the subject. She and the head of faculty work closely together in developing this understanding. Appropriate priorities have been identified for the current academic year.
- There is a routine evaluation of the teaching and learning. The head of department has a good understanding of the strengths of the teaching and areas that need to be further addressed.
- The department benefits from an excellent ethos. Members of staff work hard and they are mutually supportive. They regularly exchange ideas about developing best practice in the classroom.

### Subject issue: information and communication technology (ICT)

The use of ICT within history is excellent.

- Staff use ICT equipment regularly and extremely well to enhance the learning experience for their students. The use of the interactive whiteboard is excellent because relevant video clips and websites are carefully used and linked to specific learning outcomes.
- Students value the use of ICT in lessons. The newly created ICT room within the humanities suite gives them good access to individual work stations. They use this and other ICT equipment well to develop their skills. They value the good balance between the use of ICT and other resources for learning.
- Students make excellent progress in developing their ICT skills. For example, they can competently search websites, download relevant information and they have good word processing skills.

## Inclusion

The department has a good approach to issues of inclusion. Any differences in performance between boys and girls are routinely identified and appropriate action devised. Issues of diversity are tackled through the study of various relevant topics, including a study of slavery and other aspects of the British Empire.

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

- students' literacy skills are improved through the teaching and learning of history
- lesson planning routinely identifies targets for lower and higher attaining students and that their progress towards these is regularly evaluated.

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