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Dear Mr Walsh

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 02 and 03 June 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 (ICT) in history and on provision for gifted and talented history students.

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 and the observation of eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are average.

- The ability and progress of some students is much better than this overall judgement. For example, the high standard of written work produced by some Year 9 students on the causes of the First World War was striking, as was that of some of the Year 13 students in their personal studies. Moreover, 32% of students gained A*-A grades at GCSE in 2007 and this was above the national average.
- Most students achieve satisfactorily but some underachieve. For example, steps have been taken to remedy the underperformance of boys at the highest grades at GCSE in 2007.

- Students are developing a clear understanding of the topics they study. Some have a good knowledge and can analyse sources appropriately. When given the opportunity, many can articulate sound views and provide suitable evidence to support their opinions. However, this does not always happen in lessons because opportunities to improve oral communication skills through discussion and debate are not being regularly considered.
- History makes a good contribution to the students' personal development. Students have positive attitudes towards their work and most enjoy their lessons largely because of the hard work of their teachers. Such is the students' enjoyment of history that it is one of the most popular optional subjects at GCSE.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Teachers are well qualified, have good subject knowledge and a clear understanding of examination requirements. They are enthusiastic about the subject and are reflective about their work. They are keen for students to do well and this is much appreciated by the students, as is their willingness to give of their time to provide revision and coursework support sessions.
- The pre-examination revision lessons for Year 11 students, which I observed and which took place immediately before the GCSE final examination paper, were tightly focussed and carefully structured. The students valued these.
- Lessons are well planned. Teachers communicate clear objectives so that students know what is expected. A variety of teaching strategies and a range of activities help to maintain the students' interest and engagement. Lessons have pace but too often opportunities for students to think about what they are learning, to discuss and debate the issues and to reflect on what they have learned are not taken.
- The needs of those students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are regularly considered. However, the needs of those who are more able are only partially met and expectations of what they can achieve are not high enough.
- Teacher assessments are generous, particularly at Key Stage 3, and marking is variable. Books are marked but not regularly enough. Comments are made on the quality of the work produced and praise is given when appropriate. However, there is insufficient subject guidance to students on how to improve specifically in history.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- The school has taken steps to personalise the curriculum at Key Stage 3 in an attempt to raise standards and achievement and to meet more effectively the needs of groups and individual students. The introduction of a GCSE Humanities course for students in Years 8 and 9 has retained discrete teaching in history. However, the curriculum does

not fully meet statutory requirements. The school is aware of this and plans are in place to address the issue.

- The curriculum at Key Stage 4 is good, not least because it is enriched with a number of visits which are integrated into the schemes of work and which contribute significantly to students' learning. Students at GCSE enjoy studying both the Schools History Project course and the History Pilot course, while sixth form students appreciate the range of topics they cover at Advanced Level.
- Frequent links are made to literacy and occasionally to citizenship through, for example, the study of civil rights in America in the twentieth century. However, explicit links to other curricular areas are limited.
- Planning is thorough. Schemes of work and suggested lesson plans provide a useful basis for teachers to prepare their lessons but they do not sufficiently identify specific tasks to challenge gifted history students.
- Students enjoy the visits to places of historical interest such as the GCSE trips to Yorkshire castles and to the Thackray Medical Museum. However, curriculum enrichment through learning outside the classroom is limited outside Years 10 and 11.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of history are satisfactory.

- The head of department is enthusiastic and well motivated and is keen to raise the profile of the subject and to see provision for history develop throughout the school. His hard work is much appreciated by colleagues as well as by students.
- The department is well organised and runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. The historians benefit from teaching in adjacent rooms, work effectively as a team and share good practice through joint planning.
- Self evaluation is accurate and the department has identified strengths and what needs to be done to bring about further improvement. However, progress on the latter has been mixed. The department has responded promptly to a recent ICT review and increased, for example, the use of ICT in lessons. However, its response to a review about assessment has been much slower and marking, for example, remains variable.
- Examination results at GCSE and AS/A2 are analysed. However, there is no similar review of data at Key Stage 3. As a result, the opportunity is missed to include the outcomes of that analysis in future departmental and faculty planning.

Subject issue: ICT

The use of ICT in history is good.

- Digital projectors are available in all classrooms and they are used regularly and effectively by teachers to support learning. Students enjoy and value their use.

- Students have a number of appropriate opportunities to use ICT in their work and teachers are keen to extend these in the schemes of work.

Subject issue: provision for gifted and talented history students

The provision for gifted history students is satisfactory.

- Schemes of work and lesson plans do not identify sufficiently opportunities to challenge gifted history students and do not indicate clearly what is expected of them. As a result, opportunities to challenge these students to attain even higher standards are missed.
- Enrichment activities outside lessons for gifted history students are limited. Plans are in place to develop this; for example, some of the gifted history students in Year 8 are to be involved in a visit to Jorvik.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- reviewing the curriculum at Key Stage 3 to ensure that it fully meets the National Curriculum requirements
- developing teaching strategies to include more opportunities for students to discuss and reflect upon what they are learning
- developing assessment practice, particularly feedback to ensure that all students benefit from regular and precise advice on how they can improve their work
- ensuring that the needs of gifted history students are met effectively.

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

Michael Maddison
Her Majesty's Inspector
Ofsted's Specialist Adviser for History