

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquire@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



16 July 2008

Mr P Marshall
Headteacher
Marriotts School
Telford Avenue
Stevenage
Hertfordshire
SG2 0AN

Dear Mr Marshall

Ofsted 2007-8 subject survey inspection programme: history and the Key Stage 3 curriculum

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during the visit by Andrew Harrett HMI on 08 July to look at the Key Stage 3 curriculum and by me on 08 and 09 July 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 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 a number of lessons.

History

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Standards are below average but achievement is satisfactory.

- The attainment and progress of some students is much better than this overall judgement. For example, the high standard of written work produced by some Year 8 students on the abolition of slavery was striking, as was that of some of the Year 9 students on the causes of the Second World War.

- At GCSE history is one of the best performing subjects in the school but standards are below average. Nevertheless, there is evidence that standards are rising and that a greater proportion of students will gain at least a grade C this summer.
- Standards at A Level are average. Students enjoy the challenge of more advanced study in history and most make satisfactory progress. Some make good progress.
- Students are developing a good understanding of the topics studied. 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.
- History makes a good contribution to the students' personal development. Most students have positive attitudes towards history 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 with some good features.

- Teachers are well qualified and work hard to help students who are very appreciative of the willingness of staff to give their time, especially when approaching public examinations in Year 11 and in the sixth form.
- Lessons are well planned. Teachers know what they are trying to achieve and this is communicated to students through appropriate lesson objectives. Relationships are generally good.
- In the best lessons, teaching is engaging, there is pace and challenge and a variety of activities help to maintain students' interest. In the less successful lessons, expectations are not high enough and the work set is undemanding.
- Teachers' questions, particularly supplementary ones, challenge students to think and this strengthens learning. Unfortunately this practice is not consistent across the department and opportunities for students to discuss and reflect upon what they are learning are not always provided.
- The needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well met and teaching assistants give valuable support to those students who require it.
- Teacher assessments are generous, particularly at Key Stage 3, and marking is variable. Books are marked regularly, comments are made on the quality of the work produced, and praise is given when appropriate. Guidance on how to improve in history is provided by some teachers but this is not common practice across all teaching groups.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- The department has reviewed its schemes of work to meet the challenges of whole-school curriculum changes and is considering a thematic approach to meet the implications of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum in history. However, plans are not yet finalised to ensure that the statutory requirements are fully met and that specified topics are appropriately covered.
- Frequent links are made to literacy and occasionally to citizenship through, for example, the study of the treatment of the Jews in Germany in the 1930s. However, explicit links to other curricular areas are more limited.
- Curriculum enrichment in history is modest and the opportunity to strengthen learning through external visits or by visitors coming into school is missed.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory with some good features.

- The head of department, who is also head of humanities, is enthusiastic, well motivated and keen to maintain history as a popular subject throughout the school. She is extremely well organised and her 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. History teachers benefit from being located in the same part of the school and the department is proactive in being involved, for example, in whole-school initiatives to promote the social and emotional aspects of students' learning.
- Planning is thorough and schemes of work provide a firm foundation for teachers to prepare for their specific groups. However, with faculty meetings being dominated by administrative matters, opportunities to share good practice and improve teaching are not being fully realised.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and the department has a clear picture of its strengths and areas for improvement. Examination results at A Level and at GCSE are thoroughly analysed but the analysis of students' attainment at Key Stage 3 is not comprehensive. As a result, the opportunity to use the outcomes of such an analysis to inform future planning and to improve teaching and learning is missed.

Subject issue: ICT

The use of ICT in history is satisfactory.

- Most teaching rooms have recently been fitted with digital projectors and whiteboards. However, the benefits of this equipment to enrich teaching have not yet been fully realised because some staff are hesitant about using it.
- 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. Students in Year 9 particularly enjoy producing multimedia presentations on events about the Second World War and plans are well advanced for a topic in Year 8 using data about Bedford Gaol.

Subject issue: provision for gifted and talented history students

The provision for gifted history students is satisfactory.

- The head of department is committed to improving provision for gifted history students. Such students are identified on a register and are known to individual teachers. However, schemes of work do not sufficiently identify opportunities to challenge gifted history students and do not clearly indicate what is expected of them. As a result, opportunities to challenge these students to attain even higher standards are missed.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

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

Leadership and management: planning for the introduction of the revised National Curriculum at Key Stage 3

Planning and preparation for the introduction of the new curriculum into Year 7 in September 2008 has been good.

- Leaders and managers have been considering how to improve the curriculum at Key Stage 3 for some years. Consequently, their plans for the statutory changes required from September 2008 are well advanced.
- Training for the changes has been well organised so that subject leaders have been effectively involved in planning the new curriculum, particularly in ensuring that the content of the curriculum and the teaching of essential skills for learning and personal development have been carefully mapped across subjects.
- The changes for Year 7 are embedded in plans which are designed to take the curriculum forward for the whole school over the next few years. These plans are appropriately ambitious and grounded in a determination to provide students with the skills which are necessary to raise their standards and achievement.

- Arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the introduction of the new curriculum are robust and increasingly involve the whole school community.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop history and the Key Stage 3 curriculum 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