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Mr P Thomas  
Acting Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Thomas

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 21 and 22 October 2008 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 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 you, nominated staff and students, a scrutiny of relevant documentation, an analysis of students' work, attendance at a departmental meeting and the observation of eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good but standards are below average.

- Students make good progress over time. Students in Year 9 are developing well their knowledge of child labour in Victorian Britain, while those in Year 11 are enhancing their understanding of improvements to medicine over time. In the sixth form, students are making good progress in understanding the reasons for the passing of the Reform Act in 1832 and how European powers colonised Africa in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

- At all ages, students use historical evidence with confidence. They can competently evaluate primary and secondary sources, and they can make good deductions from these. Their skills at interpreting evidence are being fostered well.
- Results in the national assessments at Key Stage 3 over the last three years have shown a marked improvement at the expected Level 5+. There has been a significant rise in numbers achieving the higher Level 6+ over the same period.
- Results in the GCSE examinations have improved over the same period. In 2006, 42% attained grades A\* to C and this has risen to 53% in the provisional results for 2008. There is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls. A number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities gained pass grades, including four students with statements of special educational needs. At A level, the provisional results for 2008 show that all students attained a pass grade but at AS level only 82% did so.
- Students' skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening are underdeveloped. They make basic mistakes in their use of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Higher attaining students write extensively but this is not the case for the others. They cannot always speak about or discuss issues at length. The presentation of their written work is often untidy.
- Students' behaviour is excellent. They settle down well in their lessons, maintain their concentration, and work well with each other and with the adults.

### Quality of teaching and learning of history

The quality of teaching and learning is good with outstanding features.

- Lessons are well planned with activities that meet the needs of the various abilities. Teachers plan appropriate work for the higher and lower attainers.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and they use this well to extend the students' understanding. Questioning is brisk and challenging. Time is efficiently managed and students are given explicit timescales for activities.
- Teachers are enthusiastic about their subject and there are good relationships. The students stated that teachers made learning fun.
- The management of learning activities and of classes is excellent. Teachers have appropriately high expectations and they ensure that there is a good learning environment. Students are aware of the routines and expectations laid down by the teachers.
- Good feedback is regularly provided to individuals and to whole classes. There is good use of self-assessment by the students.
- Teaching assistants are used productively to enhance the progress of identified students. They work intensively with the students to enable them to make good progress.
- The quality of marking is good. Teachers regularly make evaluative comments and set targets for improvement. Students say they value these targets because they enable them to make even better progress.

## Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced, and it meets the needs of all students. At Key Stage 3, planning for the new requirements is well under way. A broad overview for the three years has been developed and detailed schemes of work are being produced for the current Year 7.
- Good schemes of work have been produced for the other study units being covered.
- The curriculum is enriched by a good range of extra-curricular activities. Older students visit the First World War battlefields in France and Belgium, and there are regular opportunities to visit Auschwitz. Students also go to Southwell work house in Nottinghamshire. As part of its specialist status, the school has fostered very strong links with neighbouring schools. Valuable collaborative work is undertaken in history with a local special school so that the learning experiences of both groups of students are significantly enhanced. Students say how much they enjoy these activities.

## Leadership and management of history

The leadership and management of history are good.

- The department benefits from good leadership and direction. The head of department has a clear view of strengths and weaknesses through a detailed self-evaluation. This is because the work of the department is regularly checked through lesson observations, a scrutiny of written work and discussions with students. The department knows how it wants to develop.
- Staff work hard and there is good team spirit. Staff are well motivated.
- Thorough systems are in place to monitor students' progress and to identify and take appropriate action with underachievers. Such students are then intensively mentored.
- Students say there is a distinctive and positive ethos in history which they recognise and value. They say that staff are always keen to help them.

## Subject issue: ICT

The use of ICT is good.

- All classrooms have whiteboards which the teachers use effectively. PowerPoint presentations are used well to introduce lessons.
- Students benefit from access to a good range of hardware, including wireless laptops. They are competent users of ICT and can readily interrogate websites for further research.
- The school has developed a portal that all students can access. The portal provides up-to-date information to them and their parents/carers about the subject. The students value the use of ICT and say it enhances their learning.

Subject issue: gifted and talented history students

The provision for gifted and talented history students is good.

- The school has identified a number of gifted historians from every year group. This has been done after a careful evaluation of their abilities and interests by the staff.
- The needs of such students are met in the day-to-day planning of lessons. They are explicitly identified and appropriate targets and extension work are routinely set for them.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that students' skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening are routinely enhanced in their history lessons.

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