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Mr A R Withell  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Withell

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 17 and 18 November 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 and the observation of eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Students start in Year 9 and make good progress in history and this is also confirmed by the school's internal data. They know about the living conditions of the urban poor in Victorian Britain and are developing good knowledge and understanding of the Civil Rights movement in the USA in the 1950s and 1960s.
- At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, students continue with this good progress. Students in Year 11 have good knowledge, for example, of the rise of Adolf Hitler, while those in Year 13 have good understanding of the Cold War from 1945 to 1962.

- At all ages students use and evaluate a good range of primary and secondary sources. They can recognise bias in historical sources, make deductions and have well developed skills of enquiry and interpretation.
- Results at GCSE have risen markedly in recent years and have been well above national averages. In 2007, 86% of students gained grades A\* to C but provisional results for 2008 indicate that this has fallen to 67.7%. However, internal data on progress indicates that results in 2009 are expected to increase significantly.
- Results at AS level continue to rise. In 2007, 88% gained a pass grade and in 2008 unvalidated data shows that this has increased to 93%. Slightly more than half attained grades A and B, a significant increase from the previous year. At A level, results have improved in recent years. In 2007, 96% achieved a pass grade while in 2008 all students did so. However, the proportion of those attaining grades A and B fell from 45% in 2007 to 23% but the school's projections for 2009 are that this will substantially improve.
- Students have excellent attitudes to their learning. They are interested in the subject, are keen to participate in whole-class discussions and contribute significantly to the good learning environment in lessons. Their behaviour is outstanding. However, a handful of students are sometimes restless and find it difficult to concentrate for sustained periods.

### Quality of teaching and learning of history

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers work hard and this is recognised and appreciated by the students.
- Lessons are characterised by good relationships. Teachers and students engage in friendly debate and there is good whole-class discussion of the topics being studied. Teachers are friendly but firm.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge, including knowledge about examination requirements. They use this knowledge well to extend and challenge the pupils' understanding in their routine questioning, or in the feedback they give after work has been marked.
- Time is efficiently used. Activities are well defined and students are given explicit timescales for completing them. As a result, the pace to the learning is enhanced.
- The students' work is regularly marked and good evaluative comments are made to help the students. Further targets for improvement are identified and the students value these. Peer assessment is regularly used in lessons and the students find this helpful.
- Lessons are planned in some detail and teachers are aware of the needs of students. However, specific targets in history for those with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities and those who are identified as gifted are not always explicitly identified in the day-to-day planning.

## Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is broad, balanced and meets requirements.
- Long term planning for the new Key Stage 3 curriculum has been completed with middle schools and the syllabus for Year 9 has been appropriately revised. Schemes of work for Year 9 are currently being prepared for the range of topics which will be covered.
- At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, detailed units of study have been prepared for the students so that examination requirements are met.
- At all ages, students say how much they enjoy studying the wide range of topics being covered.
- The curriculum is enhanced by visits to a good number of places of historical interest, for example Berlin and the First World War battlefields in France and Belgium. Students enjoy these visits. Outside visitors are also invited to speak to the students.

## Leadership and management of history

The leadership and management of history are good.

- The head of department provides clear leadership and strong direction to its work. She has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the department. This is based on an in-depth analysis of the department's work, including regular lesson observations, a scrutiny of students' work, a thorough analysis of test and examination results, and regular discussions with her line manager.
- The department is managed well. Individual staff have specific responsibility for aspects of the department's work. There is good team spirit and the students recognise and value this. Students appreciate the dedication of the staff.

## Subject issue: ICT

The provision and use of ICT are satisfactory.

- Staff make good use of interactive whiteboards in lessons. They are competent users of these and other ICT equipment. PowerPoint presentations are regularly used.
- Students have good access to history materials and other information through the school's intranet. They can catch up with lessons missed, homework or remind themselves of their targets in the subject.
- Students say they can readily access a good range of websites for their studies.
- However, the routine use of ICT in history lessons is limited. An in-depth scrutiny of students' work and discussions with them indicate that opportunities to use ICT in lessons are limited.

Subject issue: gifted and talented history students

The provision for gifted history students is good.

- The department has identified a number of students that are gifted in history. These students are set extension activities in lessons and for homework.
- Gifted Year 12 historians are chosen to mentor Year 11 students who are in danger of not getting a good grade in the GCSE examination.
- Staff ensure that gifted historians are offered relevant activities, for example through attending lectures given by leading academics in London, and by attending a workshop in medieval history. They will also participate in an archaeological dig in 2009.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving and extending students' skills in ICT
- strengthening lesson planning so that targets for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are gifted are explicitly identified and their progress towards these 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