

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 0207 421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



02 October 2008

Mrs C Lennon
Headteacher
Brigshaw High School and Language College
Brigshaw Lane
Allerton Bywater
Castleford
West Yorkshire
WF10 2HR

Dear Mrs Lennon

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during the visit on 17 and 18 September 2008 by Linden Phillips HMI and me 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 nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good but standards are average.

- Students make good progress at all key stages in developing their historical knowledge and understanding.
- Although standards are average, they are improving. For example, 62% of students gained A* to C grades at GCSE in 2008 compared with 52% in 2006. Moreover, the proportion of students who gain A* to A grades is above the national average.
- History is a popular subject at Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Students' enjoyment is visible not just in the increasing numbers opting

for the subject at GCSE and at A level but also in their involvement in lessons and their engagement with the topics they study. They are particularly keen to praise their teachers' commitment and support.

- Students are acquiring a firm appreciation of important historical skills and concepts, particularly chronology, interpretation and the nature of evidence.
- 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 whole-class 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 enjoy their lessons. This is largely the result of teachers' thoughtful planning and enthusiasm for the subject.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers' subject knowledge is good.
- Lessons are well planned with a range of appropriate tasks. Lessons promote learning and relationships are good.
- Teachers are thoughtful about the questions they ask and supplementary questioning effectively teases out student knowledge and understanding. However, questions tend to be directed at specific students and opportunities for more general discussion are missed.
- Lessons have pace but important issues are sometimes skated over in a desire to complete all the tasks planned.
- 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. However, the needs of those who are more able are only partially met.
- Marking is variable. Books are marked, 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 department has completely rewritten the curriculum at Key Stage 3 and has taken the opportunity of this revision to place a much greater emphasis upon developing skills and concepts. However, the curriculum does not fully meet statutory requirements.
- The curriculum at Key Stages 4 and in the sixth form is good and students can articulate clearly why they enjoy the topics they study and how history contributes to their education.
- Cross-curricular links within the humanities are being developed. Links are made to literacy and to citizenship through, for example, the study

of civil rights in America and the Holocaust but explicit links to other curricular areas are more limited.

- The department is keen to use learning outside the classroom to enrich learning inside the classroom. Students enjoy the trips to events and to places of historical interest such as Middleham Castle, the Thackray Medical Museum and the First World War trenches. However, curriculum enrichment through visits is limited outside Years 10 and 11.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of history are good.

- The department is extremely well led and the head of department has a clear vision of how to develop the subject.
- She is enthusiastic, well motivated and well focussed on ensuring that history is a popular and successful subject. 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, work effectively and enthusiastically as a team, and regularly share good practice through joint planning. The department is determined to improve standards and achievement through the development of better teaching and learning.
- Self evaluation is accurate and the department has a clear picture of its strengths and areas for improvement. Examination results at GCSE and at A level are thoroughly analysed, though subsequent action plans lack precise timescales.

Subject issue: ICT

The use of ICT in history is good.

- All teaching rooms have digital projectors and interactive whiteboards and they are used regularly and effectively by teachers to support learning. Students enjoy and value their use.
- Students use computers for research and for word processing. However, there are no computers available in teaching rooms for students to use in lessons. As a result, the opportunity for students to use ICT in their work is limited. The department is aware of this issue and is keen to explore how it can harness more effectively the ICT resources which are available in the school.

Subject issue: provision for gifted and talented history students

The provision for gifted history students is satisfactory.

- Gifted history students are identified on a register and are known to individual teachers.
- However, schemes of work and lesson plans 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 higher standards are missed.

- Enrichment activities outside lessons for gifted history students are limited though students in Year 7 who are identified as gifted do have the opportunity to visit Hadrian's Wall.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing teaching strategies to include more opportunities for students to discuss and reflect upon what they are learning
- improving marking and written feedback to ensure that students are given precise subject advice on how they can improve their work
- reviewing the curriculum at Key Stage 3 to ensure that it fully meets the National Curriculum requirements
- 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