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Mr J Murray  
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Dear Mr Murray

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during the visit on 11 and 12 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 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 good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good but standards are average. However, achievement and standards vary between the key stages.

- Most students make good progress and at Key Stage 3 some make outstanding progress in developing their historical knowledge and understanding. Those in Year 8, for example, know about life in Victorian times and have a good understanding of how and why the franchise was extended in the early nineteenth century. Students in Year 11 have a clear picture of the reasons for the failure of the League of Nations, whilst those in Year 12 have a good knowledge of the events which led to the French Revolution in 1789.

- Standards at Key Stage 4 are average but GCSE results in 2008 were disappointing. At A level, the provisional results for 2008 show that all students attained a pass grade but the proportion of students gaining grades A and B is lower than it was in 2007. Strategies have been put in place to tackle the issues identified at both key stages and evidence from lessons and students' work indicates that students are being prepared well for their forthcoming examinations.
- Students' historical skills are being well developed. They evaluate sources well, understand how and why historians have different interpretations of major issues, and appreciate the broader skills history provides in preparation for future employment.
- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. Students' attitudes to learning are positive, relationships are constructive and behaviour is generally good. Opportunities are provided for students to be more independent in their learning and to work out possible answers for themselves, as seen in a Year 12 lesson on the French Revolution. However, this practice is not evident in all lessons.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge. They are enthusiastic about their subject and this is reflected in the way they teach.
- Lessons are well planned and have clear objectives which are shared with the students. Lessons have pace and the good questioning strengthens learning. However, opportunities for students to discuss and debate the issues and to reflect on what they have learned are not always taken.
- A range of tasks helps to maintain students' interest and focuses them on the key points. However, there is insufficient challenge for the most able. The needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well met. They are given appropriate activities and are well supported by teaching assistants.
- Students' work is regularly marked. Praise is given and comments are made on the quality of the work produced. Guidance on how to improve in history is provided but this is not common across all teaching groups.

### Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- The current curriculum meets requirements. Students enjoy the topics they study and those in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form can explain clearly the relevance of what they are studying. In an attempt to raise standards and achievement, the department has decided to change the GCSE course from September 2008.
- The department has started to revise the curriculum at Key Stage 3 but plans are at an early stage. Teachers have yet to determine how they

intend to give appropriate time to all aspects of the revised programmes of study.

- Cross-curricular work is limited but there are strong links to literacy, with a literacy objective being a regular feature of history lessons. Links are made to citizenship through the Remembrance Day commemorations and to science by looking at how scientists and historians use each other's evidence.
- Enrichment activities are organised at each key stage and students comment on how much they enjoy external visits. These activities are integrated into the students' work and the department is keen to use visits to the benefit of all students. For example, two sixth form students have now embarked on a series of assemblies and presentations to all year groups about the 'Lessons from Auschwitz' programme with which they have been involved.

### Leadership and management

The leadership and management of history are good.

- The department benefits from good leadership. The head of department is enthusiastic and well motivated. She works unflaggingly to support her colleagues and to make history a popular and enjoyable subject.
- Teachers work well as a team. They have a passion for the subject, work hard, engage in joint planning, and regularly share resources and ideas.
- The department has a clear picture of its strengths and areas for improvement. Examination results at GCSE and A level are analysed and students' work is monitored. As a result, teachers are able to take appropriate action to support those students who require it.
- Action plans focus appropriately on raising standards and achievement. However, they do not put sufficient emphasis upon meeting the needs of the most able students.

### Subject issue: ICT

The use of ICT in history is good.

- Teachers use interactive whiteboards regularly, confidently and effectively to enhance learning. Students enjoy their use, especially when they are given opportunities to use the technology themselves.
- Students use computers for research and work 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 exploring 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 but not all teachers are aware of these students in their lessons.
- Some opportunities are identified within schemes of work for gifted history students to develop their interests and abilities. However, such references are limited.
- More able students are sometimes challenged in lessons but precise activities and tasks are rarely provided for the gifted. As a result, the opportunity to challenge these students to attain even higher standards is missed.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving standards at GCSE and in the sixth form
- ensuring the curriculum at Key Stage 3 fully meets requirements
- exploring further how to increase challenge for gifted students in history.

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