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21 November 2008

Mr I Hylan  
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Dear Mr Hylan

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history and citizenship

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during the visit on 12 and 13 November 2008 by Scott Harrison HMI and me to look at work in history and citizenship.

As outlined in our initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subjects, the visit had a particular focus on information and communication technology (ICT) in history, provision for gifted and talented history students, and assessment in citizenship.

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 data and documentation, an analysis of students' work and the observation of lessons.

### History

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be satisfactory.

#### Achievement and standards

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are average overall.

- Students' standards and progress in recent years have not been as positive as at present. Recent initiatives are having a good effect in raising current achievement and some students are now making good progress.

- Students enjoy the subject. This was clear in interviews with students and in classes. In every lesson inspected, students paid attention and were involved. They are acquiring relevant knowledge and understanding and developing appropriate historical skills. Good examples were seen during the inspection of their ability to interpret source materials and understand the nature of evidence.
- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. This was most obvious by the work currently in progress on the First World War. Students were clearly moved by some of the material used for teaching and three well written poems read out in assembly revealed good historical understanding and sensitivity to the human condition.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is judged to be satisfactory.

- Teachers' subject knowledge is good; they are keen for their students to do well and to enjoy history. They offer good support to students in class and provide additional help at other times when necessary.
- Lessons are planned conscientiously with a range of relevant tasks. Teachers ask provoking questions and the quality and enthusiasm of the interchange between students and teachers in classes is good.
- The pace of lessons is generally appropriate for most students although it is clear that there is a wide range of ability and some students struggle. Teachers do their best to deal with this and teaching assistants, when present, are well deployed to offer support.
- The school's literacy policy is beginning to have an impact on writing although current quality remains uneven. Some history writing seen in students' exercise books is of high quality.
- Marking is variable in quality. Some is very thorough, offering clear judgements on the quality of the work and how to improve. Other marking is cursory.
- The department is keen to improve and has identified a series of useful intervention strategies to help students make good progress.
- Students like it most when they are given the opportunity to take charge of their own learning. As a result, coursework and some types of homework are popular. Though they are good listeners, they also admit to 'switching off' sometimes.

### Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- The new 'Opening Minds' course in Year 7 clearly has potential and contains some history. The way in which the unit on Rome fits in with the developing Key Stage 3 is yet to be seen because the remainder of the course has yet to be developed in line with the revised National Curriculum. The current Key Stage 3 units are sound but the new National Curriculum is asking for more, especially in terms of improving children's understanding of 'big pictures', chronology and relevance to the modern world.

- The Key Stage 4 and A-level curricula offer students good opportunities for developing their understanding of the subject.

## Leadership and management

The leadership and management of history are satisfactory.

- The head of department and the school's senior management team monitor the department well and have made an accurate assessment of its strengths and weaknesses. Examination and other results are carefully evaluated. The department's self-evaluation document is accurate and useful though some judgements are not sufficiently clear.
- Managers have been active in trying to raise standards through various intervention strategies and these are now proving successful, though opportunities for students to be more independent in their learning are underdeveloped.
- Managers at all levels are enthusiastic about the subject and communicate effectively to students the potential of history in helping them to understand the present.

## Subject issue: ICT

The use of ICT in history is good.

- Good use is made of film and computers for research, word processing and materials for presentations.
- Digital projectors and interactive whiteboards are used effectively by teachers. One weakness is that there are no computers in teaching rooms, which limits access. However, all students interviewed said that they make extensive use of their computers at home for work in history.

## Subject issue: provision for gifted and talented history students

The provision for gifted history students is satisfactory.

- The school has recently developed a useful policy which is beginning to be put into effect in departments.
- Present provision within history classes is limited. Examples seen of extension work in history are sound but there is scope for further development using more able students' ability to work independently and write and discuss to a high standard.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing further the Key Stage 3 history curriculum to bring into line with the new National Curriculum
- improving the provision in history for the gifted and talented
- ensuring greater consistency in the quality of marking
- providing more opportunities for students to take more responsibility for their learning.

## Citizenship

The overall effectiveness of citizenship was judged to be satisfactory.

### Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall.

- Students studying GCSE citizenship and citizenship within the GCSE Philosophy and Ethics course demonstrated good knowledge and understanding of aspects of citizenship, including government and the law.
- For other students, however, knowledge and understanding was patchy. Relative strengths were in the discussion of topical issues in contexts such as law and animal rights. Currently students in Key Stage 3 know little about government and parliament because these are not taught until Year 9 of the course.
- Year 7 students demonstrated good progress in their understanding of concepts related to human rights and slavery in the context of their study of the Romans.
- Only a small amount of written work was seen. In Key Stage 4 this was of satisfactory quality, with some depth on aspects of citizenship such as discrimination. Work in books from Key Stage 3 was limited in quantity and rather stereotyped.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in lessons observed was good.

- The 'Opening Minds' lessons with significant elements of citizenship were well planned with a good range of challenging activities to stimulate discussion.
- A good GCSE citizenship lesson engaged all students in discussion and exploration of discrimination, building up a conceptual map of aspects and examples.
- However, reflecting on their experience of citizenship teaching over the Key Stage, Year 9 students interviewed were unenthusiastic about citizenship because of the over-use of worksheets and lack of opportunity for discussion in some lessons.
- Written work is adequately marked and the school is seeking to develop formal tasks to improve the quality and use of assessment.

### Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory overall.

- The curriculum is being developed to accommodate the new 'Opening Minds' course in Year 7 and a new Philosophy and Ethics GCSE, which replaced the short course GCSE in citizenship. The citizenship elements of these courses have yet to be planned.

- In Year 8 and 9, citizenship is taught for one period per fortnight by a small group of teachers. This addresses the main areas of National Curriculum citizenship.
- Schemes of work suggest that key topics on rights and responsibilities, the law, and government and voting are treated in reasonable depth and that students undertake a range of tasks. These include short essays, the use of a range of media to express views and feelings, presentations and campaigns.
- The head of subject appreciates that the new GCSE Philosophy and Ethics course may not deliver a full programme of Key Stage 4 citizenship. Work is in hand to see how PSHE and 'flexi- Fridays' can fill some of the gaps. No evidence was offered to show how other subjects of the curriculum contribute to citizenship.
- The school council has the potential to make a major contribution to citizenship through the consideration and practise of democratic processes. At present the school council is well thought of by students and has significant achievements to its credit. However, issues of representation and accountability, voting and constitution which could involve all students have not been part of their agenda.
- Other aspects of the life of the school, such as assemblies, support citizenship development. A very good assembly on Remembrance was observed.
- The school provides a wide range of extra-curricular activities that give students opportunities to work in the community in leadership roles, from which many students benefit.

## Leadership and management

The leadership and management of citizenship are satisfactory.

- The school policy for citizenship is based on the principles of social and moral responsibility, community involvement and political literacy.
- The school has taken citizenship seriously and has continued to experiment with the curriculum in the light of evaluation; the self-evaluation is accurate and has appropriate priorities.
- The subject leader has made a good start to reviewing the curriculum and establishing new arrangements for assessment.
- Efforts have been made to reduce the number of teachers teaching citizenship and thus to cultivate a specialist team.
- Little help has been received from outside the school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- continue to develop and evaluate the curriculum in both Key Stages
- through team meetings, schemes of work and joint observation, develop more consistency in teaching to encourage discussion and participation as well as creative written work
- draw on the new 8 level scale to support the development of assessment tasks that give a reliable and valid picture of students' achievement
- consider whether and how the school council should be a democratic institution

- make connections with the broader citizenship education community to enrich current provision.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop history and citizenship 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

Paul Armitage  
Additional Inspector