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Mr T Boatwright  
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Dear Mr Boatwright

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during the visit on 20 and 21 January 2009 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 three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are average.

- The progress of some students is much better than this overall judgement. When given the opportunity students write well, with appropriate detail and explanation. For example, the high standard of written work produced by some Year 9 students about whether Haig deserved to be called 'the butcher of the Somme' was striking.
- Most students achieve at least satisfactorily but some underachieve. To help improve the performance of boys, for example, the department has changed the examination course it offers.

- Students are developing a sound understanding of the topics they study. Some have good knowledge and can articulate their views clearly and concisely. Students in Year 9, for example, had a good grasp of the causes of the First World War, while those in Year 11 can make appropriate links between recent events in the Middle East and in Northern Ireland.
- Source evaluation work is well developed in Year 9 and at GCSE. However, students are less confident in discussing significance and interpretations, and why historians might differ in their views and whether that matters. Historical skills are not yet embedded in the 'New Basics' course.
- History makes a good contribution to the personal development of students. They have positive attitudes to their work, behave well and show considerable interest in the topics studied. Such is students' enjoyment of history that it is one of the most popular optional subjects at GCSE.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teaching is lively and engaging and helps to explain why standards have improved in recent years at GCSE. Lessons are well planned and objectives are made clear. Information and communication technology is used well to engage students and enhance learning, and lessons move at a brisk pace.
- The needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well considered. They are identified in lesson plans and specific activities are provided for them. However, the needs of the more able students are not always met because tasks do not challenge them sufficiently.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge, are enthusiastic about history and produce good resources for the students.
- Marking is effective. Books are marked regularly, praise is given and subject-specific guidance is provided on how to improve.
- Targets are set and students know what they need to do to make progress. However, teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 are generous.

### Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum at Key Stage 4 is good. Students articulate clearly why they enjoy history and how the subject contributes to their education.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is in transition. Students in Year 9 have discrete teaching in history. However, the 'New Basics' curriculum in Years 7 and 8 does not fully meet statutory requirements and the school is addressing this.
- Cross-curricular links are developing, especially at Key Stage 3. Through the study of the Holocaust, for example, strong links are made to citizenship.

- Students in Year 9 benefit from a visit to the Imperial War Museum in London. The visit is closely linked to their studies on the First and Second World Wars. However, overall curriculum enrichment through learning outside the classroom is limited.

## Leadership and management

The leadership and management of history are satisfactory.

- Although inexperienced, the temporary head of department is enthusiastic, well motivated and determined to ensure that history continues as a popular subject. He is well supported by his colleagues in the department.
- The department is well organised and runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. The head of department has worked hard with former and current colleagues to create and maintain an impressive ICT resource bank of materials to be used by teachers and students.
- Self evaluation is sound. The head of department has a secure view of the strengths and areas for development and since his appointment he has rightly focussed on improving standards and achievement and on meeting the needs of current examination groups in Year 11.

## Subject issue: information and communication technology

The use of ICT in history is good.

- Digital projectors in all classrooms are used regularly and effectively and students say how the use of interactive whiteboards can bring a different perspective to their learning. Students in Year 10, for example, benefited considerably from the video clips used to explain how America became involved in the Vietnam War.
- Teachers use well-prepared ICT resources and these are being made increasingly available on the school's learning platform, a development in which history teachers are centrally involved.
- Students use ICT regularly for word-processing assignments and for research. The department encourages students to produce their own work through different media, as in the case of some Year 9 students who particularly enjoyed producing their own podcasts on Stalingrad.

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

The provision for gifted history students is satisfactory.

- Gifted history students are known to teachers and the new head of department is committed to improving provision for them. However, schemes of work and lesson plans do not identify sufficiently activities and tasks for gifted history students and do not indicate clearly what is expected of them. As a result, the opportunity to challenge these students to attain even higher standards is missed.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring the consistency of assessment at Key Stage 3
- ensuring the curriculum at Key Stage 3 fully meets 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