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Mrs C Reid
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Dear Mrs Reid

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 28 and 29 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 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. Provision for a group of Year 7 students identified as gifted and talented was also observed.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Students of all abilities make good progress. Students in Year 9 can evaluate historical sources about the sinking of the Titanic well, while those in Key Stage 4 have good knowledge and understanding of modern world history, including the strengths and weaknesses of the League of Nations. In the sixth form, students are developing the full range of historical skills when studying, for example, the Tudors.
- Students are developing their chronological understanding well and can place historical events in a logical sequence. At all ages, they can competently use skills of enquiry and the evaluation of historical

sources. The higher attainers have good skills of organisation and communication.

- Recent examinations results have improved. In 2008, the GCSE results were slightly above the national average but the proportion achieving grades A* and A was below this average. At AS level, 90% gained a pass grade, with 62% gaining grades A or B. At A level, all students passed and half achieved a grade A or B. The department is highly ambitious for its students and its current tracking information for Year 11 indicates that 76% will achieve an A* to C grade at GCSE, with 24% on target to achieve A* to A.
- Students' personal development is excellent. Their attitudes to learning are exemplary and their behaviour outstanding. They work well with each other and with their teachers, and contribute constructively to discussions.

Quality of teaching and learning of history

The quality of teaching and learning is good with outstanding features.

- Lessons are planned in detail and the needs of all the abilities are identified.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and they use this well in extending students' understanding through incisive questioning. The interactive whiteboard is used well to stimulate discussion.
- A good range of strategies is used to meet the needs of the various abilities. This includes whole-class teaching, and work in pairs and small groups. Good feedback is given to whole classes and to individuals.
- There is a good learning environment in lessons and relationships are excellent. Teachers have realistically high expectations and students value the help and support they receive.
- There is a good pace to the learning and students are regularly reminded of how much time they have for particular activities. They respond well to this and have a sense of urgency to what they are doing.
- Although lesson planning is detailed, it does not yet routinely identify specific history targets for particular groups or individuals.
- Teachers mark work conscientiously and make helpful comments for individual students, which the latter value. However, teachers' comments, especially at Key Stage 3, are not always precise enough or linked to the targets that have been identified for the students.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is broad and generally well balanced. The department is revising its schemes of work in response to recent changes at Key Stage 3 and it has introduced a theme-based approach with geography in Year 7. More detailed planning is being undertaken for Years 8 and 9. However, it is important that the integrity of the subject is

maintained within this approach. At Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, students are taught a good range of different historical periods.

- The curriculum is enriched by visits to a good number of historical places, including the First World War battlefields in France and Belgium and, more locally, Kenilworth and Warwick castles. Visitors are also occasionally invited.
- The range of experiences and topics offered greatly enhances students' enjoyment of the subject and they commented on how much they valued this.

Leadership and management of history

The leadership and management of history are good.

- The head of faculty and the subject leader provide good leadership and direction to the work of the subject. There is good team spirit among the staff.
- The department has a good understanding of its strengths and areas that need further development through rigorous and accurate self-evaluation. This is because there is a good system for checking on its work, including the observation of lessons, scrutinising students' work and the detailed analysis of data.
- Comprehensive systems for gathering data and evaluating them are in place. The staff can readily identify trends through the tracking of individual students. The students are aware of this tracking and value it.
- The subject has undergone some staffing changes in the recent past but this has now settled. Staff work hard for the benefit of the students and history is rapidly gaining in popularity, especially as an option choice at Key Stage 4.

Subject issue: ICT

The provision in ICT is good.

- Each classroom has an interactive whiteboard and this is used well by both the staff and the students. The school has an intranet site which allows students to follow up on homework, coursework and other relevant matters.
- The department benefits from the use of a dedicated ICT suite that is regularly used. Students prepare PowerPoint presentations; search websites and can competently download appropriate information.
- Although there is good use of ICT, aspects of handling data are less well developed.

Subject issue: provision for gifted and talented history students

The provision for gifted history students is good.

- The staff are aware of which students have a particular aptitude for history. These students are routinely identified in the planning and extension work, both oral and written, is set for them. In Year 7, such

students are taught well by a specialist teacher who works across the local cluster of schools.

- The students are also set lengthier independent research tasks to do at home, for example researching ancestors involved in the First World War. They thoroughly enjoy doing such work.
- Many such students write well and extensively for different audiences and purposes. Their empathetic writing skills are good.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- strengthening marking, especially at Key Stage 3, and lesson planning so that more precise history targets are routinely identified for individuals and groups
- evaluating regularly students' progress towards meeting these targets.

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