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Mr C Currie
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Dear Mr Currie

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 29 and 30 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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is outstanding. Standards are average at Key Stage 4 and consistently above average at Key Stage 3.

- Students make outstanding progress in Years 7 to 9 in developing their historical knowledge and understanding. Progress is also excellent during Key Stage 4, since the attainment of groups embarking on their examination work varies markedly and yet students attain, and often exceed, their predicted grades.
- Students say their lessons are stimulating and often good fun. They are motivated to do well and work hard. Students in Key Stages 3 and 4 spoke confidently about what they thought were the 'lessons of history' and how historians use evidence to support their

interpretations. They used good examples from their current work, especially about the modern world.

- Historical skills are being developed extremely well, and extended writing is a real strength of essay work and class projects.
- Students have confidence to ask questions in class and collaborate well in pairs and small group discussions. They speak well when asked to report back to the whole class. They particularly like making PowerPoint presentations.
- Students' personal development in history is outstanding. They are highly motivated and fully engaged in their learning. They behave extremely well.
- Students said they were attracted by the new GCSE course.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding.

- Teachers' subject knowledge is extremely good and they engage students well in lessons.
- Lessons are very well planned, have clear objectives and are suitably varied and challenging for students. The department has begun to address well the needs of more able students but acknowledges that more work is required to ensure that all able students are challenged fully to demonstrate exceptional performance.
- Work is marked carefully and accurately and students are kept regularly informed about how well they are doing. The department uses its bank of support materials very well to enable all groups of students to enjoy their history. Formal assessments are particularly well planned and students said they enjoy these tasks.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is outstanding.

- The curriculum has been reviewed carefully and there is a new Year 7 programme which meets the needs of the new history curriculum at Key Stage 3 whilst retaining much that was good in the older curriculum. There are good plans to extend this Year 7 curriculum to Years 8 and 9.
- The department has been able to plan and adopt a new GCSE course using the Welsh Board's Modern World History course. This has had a marked impact on improved results. As a consequence, history is increasingly popular at Key Stage 4.
- The history curriculum helps the subject to contribute well to the school's requirement to foster community cohesion. There are good, and improving, links with other subjects such as English, and particularly citizenship.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management of history are outstanding.

- The head of department has developed an excellent team of enthusiastic and committed history teachers. The department has focused well on securing improved results at GCSE and introducing the new Key Stage 3 curriculum. All teachers have a very clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement within the subject.
- The head of department is used by a university to undertake some PGCE work and her mentoring of new colleagues is exceptionally good.
- The subject is organised extremely well and all resources are utilised effectively and efficiently.
- The subject is well regarded within the school.

Subject issue: ICT

The use of ICT is outstanding.

- All students have regular opportunities to use computers and in-class interactive whiteboards. Students value the use of computers for research and for creating presentations.
- Students have good access to computers and a very good range of ICT multimedia. Interrogation of web sites is a common activity for students.

Subject issue: provision for gifted and talented history students

Provision is good.

- Gifted young historians have been identified for all years.
- More able students achieve well in history.
- The head of department works very well with the lead teacher for gifted and talented provision and she is developing effective approaches to disseminating good ideas and activities for students to follow. History is in the forefront of developing approaches to meeting the needs of more able students in the school, for instance in devising questions which require more abstract thinking at a deeper level.
- Gifted history students are able to talk confidently about the nature of history and their sense of the past, but some of them require more challenge in lessons to demonstrate their high ability.
- Extension work is identified on lessons plans, but this is not matched closely enough to the needs of individual gifted history students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing more challenging activities and assignments for able history students.

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

Peter Limm
Her Majesty's Inspector