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Dear Mrs Grimes

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during the visit on 25 and 26 March 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 five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

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

- At Key Stage 3, achievement is satisfactory and standards are average. However, the ability and progress of some students is much better than this judgement suggests. For example, some Year 9 students produce a high standard of written work and show much imagination in their historical novels about life in the trenches.
- At Key Stage 4, achievement is good and standards are above average. The 2008 GCSE results were particularly pleasing with the proportion of students gaining grades A* to A being twice the national average.

Students in Years 10 and 11 discuss and write well, as shown in their work on medicine through time and in their coursework on the Easter Rising.

- In the sixth form achievement is good and standards are above average. Students discuss and debate fluently and form clear judgements based on strong evidence and well reasoned argument.
- Historical skills are being developed well. Students have good enquiry skills and can evaluate sources confidently and intelligently. Older students in particular understand how and why historians have different interpretations of individuals and events, and why this is important.
- Students appreciate the broader skills history provides in preparation for future employment, especially the importance of being able to analyse texts, select information and evaluate for reliability.
- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. Students like history and they generally enjoy their lessons.
- Students work well on their own or in groups. This is particularly true at GCSE and in the sixth form where their behaviour is good, sometimes outstanding. However, students in Year 9 are not as well engaged with their work.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge, are enthusiastic about the subject and have a good awareness of how to teach it effectively.
- Lessons are well planned and good questioning strengthens learning. Lessons have clear objectives and outcomes which are shared with students. However, occasionally insufficient time is left towards the end of lessons to recap on what has been learned and to ensure that objectives have been met.
- Lessons have pace and students are given a range of focused tasks. These include practical activities which they particularly enjoy.
- The needs of students are well met through a wide range of resources and activities which are used to support and challenge students effectively.
- Assessment is accurate and feedback to students, including marking in books, is exemplary. Comments are thorough, praise is given as appropriate, and subject-specific guidance provided. Students say how much they appreciate the detailed marking they receive in history.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets requirements. In consultation with its main feeder middle school, the department has revised the scheme of work for students in Year 9. However, teachers have yet to finalise how they intend to make the curriculum more relevant and engaging for students and give appropriate time to all aspects of the revised programmes of study, especially local history.

- The curriculum at GCSE and in the sixth form is good and students are taught a wide range of different historical topics and themes.
- Cross-curricular links are strong. There are effective links to literacy and citizenship, as well as to art and drama.
- Curriculum enrichment activities are limited. At Key Stage 4 students visit Ickworth House as part of their course. However, apart from this, opportunities to enrich the curriculum through visits to places of historical interest and the use of visitors are underdeveloped.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of history are good.

- The head of department is enthusiastic and well motivated and the hard work of both history teachers is much appreciated by students following examination courses. The department has high expectations, is popular, and increasing numbers of students are taking history at GCSE and in the sixth form.
- The department is well organised and runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Collaboration is strong; teachers benefit from teaching in adjacent classrooms and share good practice through joint planning.
- Schemes of work provide a general outline of what should be taught. However, they lack sufficient specific guidance for teachers on opportunities to develop important skills.
- The department is developing a clear picture of its strengths and areas for improvement. Examination results at GCSE are analysed and students' work is monitored. As a result, teachers are able to take appropriate action to support students who require it.

Subject issue: ICT

The use of ICT in history is good.

- Teachers use digital projectors and interactive whiteboards regularly in lessons. Students enjoy this technology and say how much PowerPoint presentations and video clips aid their learning.
- Students have the opportunity to produce work on computers. For example, students in Year 9 use them to produce written and illustrative work on the value of art in studying the First World War, and Year 11 students use them for word processing their coursework assignments. However, younger students say that they would like more opportunities to use ICT in their work.

Subject issue: provision for gifted and talented history students

The provision for gifted history students is good.

- Gifted history students are identified on a register and are known to individual teachers.
- In lessons, gifted students are well challenged, often through specific resources and tasks. They have good knowledge and appreciate the importance of what they learn. As one Year 9 student said, 'If we don't

have historical knowledge, how can we understand what is going on in the present?'

- In recent years some extra-curricular activities have been organised for gifted history students but current provision is limited.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- providing more enrichment activities outside the classroom to promote students' engagement with history
- developing the relevance of the curriculum at Key Stage 3
- developing younger students' use of ICT 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