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Mr Sanders
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Sanders

Ofsted survey inspection programme - history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 19 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 pupils.

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, analysis of students' work and observation of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is outstanding and standards are well above average.

- Students make outstanding progress at Key Stage 3 in developing their historical knowledge and understanding. They continue this excellent progress through Key Stage 4 but the department is aware that some more able students just failed to obtain their predicted grades in 2008. The department has focused hard since last summer on ensuring that all students are fully aware of what is needed to achieve the highest grades.

- Students say their history lessons are stimulating and good fun. They are motivated to do well and work hard. Students in Key Stage 4 spoke confidently about what they thought were the 'lessons of history' and how, although historians use their imaginations, they cannot simply make things up. They used many examples from across their experience of history to support their arguments.
- Historical skills are being developed extremely well. Students have many opportunities to develop their writing skills and to develop their vocabulary of historical terms and concepts.
- Students have confidence to ask interesting and perceptive questions in class, and they collaborate well in pairs and small group discussions. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well and this explains why they perform extremely well.
- Students' personal development in history is outstanding. They are highly motivated and fully engaged in their learning. They behave extremely well.

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. They have clear objectives, are suitably varied and are challenging for students.
- The department has begun to address 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 head of department has developed an excellent bank of resources for use on interactive whiteboards and there are many films and extracts from textbooks which can be used easily by students in class. There are good plans in place to enable students to access these resources outside class time. Learning has been enriched and enlivened by this set of computer based programmes. Formal assessments are particularly well planned and students indicated they enjoyed these tasks.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- The department has reviewed its Key Stage 3 curriculum well so that in Year 7 most aspects of the new requirements are met in an imaginative way. There are clear plans for how this will be developed further in Year 8. The head of department has used creatively the strengths of the school's two specialisms - sport and languages - to ensure that strong links have been made with both subjects.
- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 still lacks sufficient opportunities for students to develop their knowledge and understanding of local and

oral history and the head of department is planning to include more visits which are designed to improve these aspects.

- History at GCSE is very popular and the department has ensured that all groups and abilities of students are well supported throughout the course.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management of history are outstanding.

- The head of department and the other teacher of history have both worked hard to ensure that provision for history is excellent. Both, in their differing ways, support the development of the subject extremely well and have embraced new technologies positively as a means to improve students' enjoyment of history and their overall achievement.
- Self-evaluation within history is good and there are good analyses of performance combined with realistic plans for further development.
- The subject is organised extremely well and all resources are utilised effectively and efficiently.
- The subject is well regarded within the school.

Subject issue: information and communication technology

The use of ICT is outstanding.

- All students have regular opportunities to use computers and in-class interactive whiteboards. Students say how much they particularly like the opportunities to use the whiteboards and talk to the whole class about their ideas.
- Students have good access to computers and many use laptops outside class time to bolster their learning. This is particularly evident in tasks undertaken using the electronic materials developed by the head of department at Key Stage 4.

Subject issue: provision for gifted and talented history students

The provision for gifted history students is good.

- Gifted young historians have been identified for all years.
- More able students achieve well in history, but it is recognised that they could do better at GCSE.
- 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 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, especially at Key Stage 4
- securing better provision for local and oral history in the Key Stage 3 curriculum.

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