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16 March 2009

Ms Felkin
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Felkin

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 02 and 03 March 2009 to look at work in history.

As outlined in our initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subjects, the visit had a particular focus on information and communication technology (ICT) in history and provision for gifted 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 data and documentation, an analysis of pupils' work and the observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in Key Stages 3 and 4 is satisfactory. Standards in both key stages are above average. In the sixth form achievement is satisfactory but standards are below average.

- The overall judgement hides the fact that some students are making good or even better progress. This was very clear in written work; for example, the work of a Year 11 student on Lyndon Johnson and the work on life in cities by a student with learning difficulties and disabilities.
- Students' personal development is good. Topics such as the slave trade have had a strong impact on students' moral values, and the study of the Great Depression has both historical and contemporary relevance, a point very clearly raised by students when interviewed. Students'

ability to evaluate was well illustrated in a lesson on Haig's success or failure as a general in the First World War.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is judged to be good.

- Recent historical data on students' progress in history indicates that at best it was satisfactory. However, changes in departmental personnel and practice are now beginning to make an impact and progress is improving. For example, greater attention is being placed on literacy, on identifying the needs of different groups of students, and on making students more aware of how to achieve the highest grades at GCSE.
- Lessons are thoroughly planned and this helps to guide students in their learning. However, during the inspection, there was evidence that this approach did not allow students to take sufficient responsibility for their own learning thereby reducing the potential for maximum progress.
- Teachers know their subject well and they convey their enthusiasm for history to students. They are keen for students to succeed. This is recognised by students who readily acknowledge the support teachers provide.
- Students' behaviour is excellent. They apply themselves well and are keen to learn.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is judged to be good.

- The curriculum provides a sound basis for the development of history skills, knowledge and understanding.
- It is appreciated by students who enjoy the topics which they see as relevant; for example, links between the study of the development of civil rights in America and the election of Barack Obama.
- The curriculum provides a good basis for teaching; teachers themselves enjoy the topics.
- The department has begun thinking about the opportunities offered by the new Key Stage 3 National Curriculum. However, the planned overall themes and justification for the choice of topics are insufficiently clear.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of history are judged to be satisfactory.

- The new leadership team in history, well supported by senior managers, is strong and has the vision, ability, systems and enthusiasm to move the subject forward.
- Examination results at GCSE and A level are reviewed. However, other performance data has not been available to history staff and so has not been analysed on a regular basis. This has inhibited the identification

of issues and focused responses, particularly in relation to improving students' progress. The school is currently addressing this issue.

Subject issue: ICT

The use of ICT in history is good.

- Students' work illustrates good use of ICT for word processing and other presentation of work. There is also extensive use of whiteboards by teachers for different forms of projection including film. During the inspection, both teachers and pupils used this facility. There is a departmental portal on the school's website which is used extensively by students for coursework and homework.

Subject issue: provision for gifted and talented history students

The provision for gifted history students is satisfactory.

- Specific, identified provision for gifted history students is new. A positive feature is the identification of such students in lesson planning and the availability of extension work. Gifted students are also helped informally by detailed dialogues with teachers. History teachers recognise that this aspect of their work is underdeveloped.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the quality and use of students' performance data available to history staff
- improving students' achievement and standards.

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

Paul Armitage
Additional Inspector