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Mrs J Cannie
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Cannie

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in history at Key Stage 3

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 23 and 24 June 2009 to look at work in history.

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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: discussions with staff and students, scrutiny of departmental documentation and a sample of students' work, and the observation of three lessons.

Features of good practice observed

- History is a well-taught and popular subject, and effective teaching has a positive impact on students' attitudes. In turn, this contributes to students' good rates of progress.
- Students enjoy history. Their interest and enthusiasm are seen in their engagement with their learning, and in their commitment to and pride in their work. Such is the take-up at GCSE that history is consistently one of the most popular optional subject choices.
- The emphasis upon an enquiry-based approach through key questions helps to ensure students are actively involved in, and ultimately take greater control of, their learning.
- The development of the full range of historical skills is a central focus of the department's approach to teaching and the work of developing students' understanding of interpretations of history is exemplary.
- Throughout their work students are encouraged to construct their own interpretations and to see the value of those interpretations. They clearly understand the importance of seeking out other views, taking the standpoint of others and respecting other opinions.

- Teachers have high expectations of students, relationships are first rate, and students appreciate the variety of activities used by teachers to make learning interesting and challenging.
- Students enjoy being challenged in their work and say that at the end of lessons 'you always come out feeling you have done something'. They are thoughtful and perceptive in their work and understand the relevance of what they are studying. As one student said, 'history expands your brain'.
- Teachers work hard to make sure students know how to make their work better. They focus on strengths and areas for improvement and give students precise targets to help them to improve.
- Feedback comments are subject specific and even the very best students are prompted by precise targets and questions requiring them to think further about the issue.
- The head of department is committed to the continuing improvement of the subject and his passion is shared by the other history teachers, all of whom are experienced and have excellent subject knowledge. They are reflective about their practice and share a belief that history matters. Students are aware of this commitment and it helps to explain their positive attitudes and their good progress.

Areas for development included:

- creating opportunities to incorporate more local history and the history of the British Isles into the curriculum.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop history in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's 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