

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs J Ruse
Headteacher
Crawshaw School
Robin Lane
Pudsey
West Yorkshire
LS28 9HU

Dear Mrs Ruse

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 23 and 24 September 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 the contribution of history to community cohesion and the development of independent learning 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. 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 students and staff, a scrutiny of relevant documentation, an analysis of students' work and the observation of nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is satisfactory.

- Standards are average at all key stages and most students make satisfactory progress. However, some make good progress.
- In recent years, results at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form have started to improve and the department has put in place a series of interventions to support students and raise achievement. However, there is scope for more students to gain the higher grades at GCSE.
- Students are developing a sound understanding of the topics they study. Some have good knowledge and, when given the opportunity, they explain ideas clearly and provide suitable evidence to support their opinions.

- The development of historical skills is satisfactory. Students investigate sources confidently, although their evaluation skills, for example, their understanding of reliability, are not strong. Older students are beginning to acquire an understanding of why historians have different interpretations of individuals and events and why this is important.
- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. Students like history and, on the whole, enjoy the lessons. Such is their interest that history is one of the most popular optional subjects at GCSE. Relationships are good and, when motivated and engaged, students have positive attitudes to learning.

Quality of teaching of history

The quality of teaching of history is satisfactory.

- Teachers are enthusiastic about the subject, well-qualified and knowledgeable. They want students to do well and their willingness to give of their time is much appreciated by them.
- Lesson planning is satisfactory and lessons have a logical structure. Teachers use a common lesson planning format consistently and this provides a focus on key questions and learning outcomes which help to structure learning.
- Some lessons have a variety of exercises and tasks, and students say how much they enjoy this variety. However, on the whole, students are too passive in lessons.
- Students enjoy answering questions but there is too little interchange among them. As a result, opportunities for them to think about what they are learning and to reflect on what they have learned are not taken.
- The needs of those students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are considered but the needs of higher-attaining students are not fully met. This is because the level of challenge within the exercises set is limited and overall expectations are not high enough.
- Marking is helpful and provides students with effective subject-specific advice and guidance. Assessment at Key Stages 4 and 5 is accurate. However, the department recognises that, in recent years, assessments at Key Stage 3 have been somewhat generous.

Quality of the history curriculum

The quality of the history curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is broad and balanced. It is currently being revised. However, it does not fully meet statutory requirements. For example, teachers have yet to finalise how they intend to give appropriate time to all aspects of the revised programmes of study, especially local history and British Isles history.
- The curriculum at Key Stages 4 and 5 is good. Students can articulate clearly why they enjoy the topics they study and how history contributes to their education. At GCSE, the department offers two courses, the Schools History Project Course

and the History Pilot Course. Both are popular, although students are increasingly opting for the Pilot Course.

- Cross-curricular links are developing. There are effective links to a number of subjects including English (literacy), citizenship, and information and communication technology.
- Students enjoy the trips to places of historical interest, such as the Imperial War Museum, but overall curriculum enrichment through learning outside the classroom is limited.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of history

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of history is satisfactory.

- The head of department is enthusiastic and committed to making history a successful subject at this humanities college. He is developing a clear picture of strengths and areas for improvement.
- The department is well-organised and runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Teachers benefit from teaching in adjoining rooms.
- Schemes of work provide helpful guidance for teachers on what should be taught and emphasise key questions and concepts. However, they lack sufficient guidance for teachers on expectations for different groups of students and an overarching rationale for the curriculum choices which have been made.

Subject issue: the contribution of history to community cohesion

The contribution of history to community cohesion is satisfactory.

- The curriculum has a series of appropriate topics and, by teaching such issues as the Holocaust and slavery, the department strengthens students' awareness of life in a culturally diverse society and their global understanding.
- The emphasis on making the relevance of topics studied clear to students helps their understanding of community cohesion.
- Students have a satisfactory understanding of how places, people and events in the past have an impact on society today. However, their awareness of the local dimension and of the impact of changes within the British Isles, for example, is limited.

Subject issue: the development of independent learning in history

The development of independent learning in history is satisfactory.

- The department recognises the importance of developing independent learning skills but opportunities for students to develop these skills are variable.
- At Key Stage 3, homework tasks in each year group focus on research activities and students in Year 9 commented that there is now a greater emphasis on them having to solve problems for themselves.
- Independent learning is more common at Key Stages 4 and 5 than at Key Stage 3, and students in Year 13 noted that they were now expected to be more

independent. However, overall students' work in lessons is too closely directed by teachers.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving achievement and standards
- developing teaching strategies to meet the needs of all students so that they take more responsibility for their own learning and have more opportunities to discuss and reflect on what they are learning
- ensuring the new curriculum at Key Stage 3 fully meets statutory requirements
- developing additional enrichment opportunities.

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