

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



14 October 2009

Mrs J Wynd
Headteacher
Tring School
Mortimer Hill
Tring
Hertfordshire
HP23 5JD

Dear Mrs Wynd

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 5 and 6 October 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 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 staff and learners, a scrutiny of relevant documentation, an analysis of students' work and the observation of 10 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement in history

Achievement is good.

- Students make good progress in all key stages leading to high standards of attainment overall. At GCSE, attainment is significantly above average at grades A* to C, though closer to average at grades A* to A. Achievement at A level was outstanding in 2008, leading to high levels of attainment. Last year, a very small minority of students did not achieve a pass grade at A level in history, but the department has since

strengthened entry requirements to ensure that students are guided more carefully onto appropriate courses.

- Students' excellent knowledge and understanding of the studies that they pursue in depth are particular strengths in all key stages, as demonstrated in their work on such topics as the English Reformation at Key Stage 3, the Vietnam War at Key Stage 4 and the British Empire in the sixth form.
- Less secure is students' chronological understanding, particularly at Key Stage 3. Students are not yet sufficiently confident in exploring links between different historical periods, or in recognising links between the past and the present.
- Students are able to assess the value of historical evidence and are very adept at communicating their ideas about the past in extended written work. However, their development of subject-specific skills is sometimes impeded by too much emphasis in lessons on knowledge acquisition.
- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. Behaviour is usually excellent and reflects the enthusiasm students have for the subject. A much higher proportion of students opt to study GCSE history than seen in other schools nationally.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching is good.

- Excellent relationships between staff and students make a very significant contribution to students' progress. Teachers create a very positive and encouraging climate for learning and students value the care and support they receive.
- Students respond well to activities where they work in pairs and in teams.
- Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge to devise lessons which promote outstanding knowledge and understanding. However, lessons are less effective in securing progression in the acquisition of subject-specific skills and give too little time to high-order thinking.
- Lessons are differentiated and students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well. However, as for other students, learning goals are not always challenging enough.
- Students are given regular opportunities to assess their own and each other's work. As a result, they have an excellent knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses and of what they need to do to improve. This is a particular strength of the department.

- Although teachers use ICT to enhance learning, its use is underdeveloped, in part owing to whole-school technical difficulties. Students in Key Stage 3 are particularly keen to use ICT more often in their history lessons.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- There is good curricular choice at Key Stage 4, where students have the opportunity to study either modern world history or a more vocational history GCSE. This newly developed GCSE provides opportunities for students to study such topics as heritage marketing. It has also made GCSE history more accessible to students who find it difficult to remember a lot of information, and to perform well in examinations.
- The department has also expanded provision in the sixth form by offering a GCSE course in humanities, in partnership with the geography department, and by introducing government and politics at A level.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is currently in transition but does not fully reflect the revised National Curriculum. 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 the history of the British Isles. The department has not yet developed the thematic approaches to the curriculum which are necessary to deepen students' chronological understanding.
- Although the curriculum offers planned opportunities for students to develop their subject-specific skills in history, these do not yet fully reflect the key concepts and processes expected. There is also insufficient planning for progression in subject-specific skills across all key stages.
- The curriculum is enhanced through opportunities to visit sites of historical importance such, as the First World War battlefields and Auschwitz, though enrichment opportunities at Key Stage 3 are more limited.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management is good.

- A very clear view of the department's strengths and areas for development is a key feature of leadership in the subject. Self-evaluation is informed by good quality reflection on the nature of school history and the quality of provision.
- Strategies for improvement are chosen well, though not all targets are sufficiently measurable with clearly defined success criteria centred on outcomes for students.

- The department is an extremely cohesive unit. There is an excellent culture of cooperation and team work, and staff willingly share expertise and teaching resources.
- Revised target setting procedures have led to the use of increasingly challenging targets. Students' progress is rigorously monitored and the department is refining intervention strategies to help ensure all students achieve the best they can. The department's work to raise the achievement of boys at GCSE has been markedly effective.

Subject issue: the contribution of history to community cohesion

The contribution of history to community cohesion is good.

- You and other school leaders have a good understanding of the requirement to promote community cohesion and have effectively evaluated the work done so far.
- Students' understanding of the local community is enhanced through valuable initiatives such as the Year 12 oral history project. Departmental staff have also reached out to the local community through their good work to develop the quality of learning in history in local primary schools.
- Older students benefit from history visits overseas. The department has enjoyed links with a school in Kenya, which have helped to develop students' understanding of non-European cultures. Understanding of non-British cultures is enhanced through very popular visits to historical sites in Europe.
- Strategies to promote community cohesion with regard to the rest of the United Kingdom are less well established.

Subject issue: the development of independent learning in history

The development of independent learning in history is satisfactory.

- Students are effective enquirers and are skilled in carrying out research tasks structured for them by teachers.
- However, they are not yet routinely given the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning through such activities as planning their own research, speculating, suggesting hypotheses and taking risks.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- devising lesson strategies which provide more challenge for pupils of all abilities, with much more focus on evaluative and subject-specific skills

- developing the Key Stage 3 curriculum to ensure it fully reflects the revised National Curriculum
- ensuring that lesson planning and the departmental development plan are more sharply focused on outcomes for students.

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

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector