

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



14 December 2009

Miss C Oates
Headteacher
Cirencester Kingshill School
Kingshill Lane
Cirencester
Gloucestershire
GL7 1HS

Dear Miss Oates

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 24 and 25 November 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff and students, a scrutiny of relevant documentation, an analysis of students' work and the observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- Standards in both key stages are above average and the progress made by students is good. Results in GCSE examinations in 2009 improved significantly compared with 2008. Particularly strong features accounting for the good progress are students' attitudes to the subject, their willingness to work with teachers and their active engagement in lessons.
- Students' personal development is outstanding. They have a very mature approach to the content of the subject, illustrating breadth of understanding. A good example of this was a discussion with a group of students when one reflected that when studying slavery, 'the stories of the things that people have gone through make you stronger as a person'.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching of history is good.

- Teachers' knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject are outstanding and this has a positive impact on students. Lessons are planned well and objectives are conveyed clearly to students. Teachers are good at questioning. A good example was a Year 7 lesson on Roman villas when students' responses were accurate and perceptive.
- Teachers know their students well and thus the delivery and content of lessons are generally matched well to the needs and attitudes of students. The faculty is exploring how it can develop current teaching strategies even further to raise standards. Teachers' knowledge of students is reinforced by regular assessment of their progress, and many self-assessment opportunities enable students to understand how well they are doing and how they can improve. Teaching assistants are deployed well to support the less-able. Resources are used well and include books, interactive whiteboards, artefacts and clothing. Some of the latter are hired from the local museum.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the history curriculum is good.

- The initial 'What is History?' course works well. Students come from 28 feeder primary schools and this course gives teachers a good idea of the ability of new students. A positive feature of the curriculum is that it is based on a clear chronology. This helps students to locate events in history which they remember well. The curriculum is kept under constant review and the development plan indicates the intention for more exploration of the current Key Stage 3 programme of study with a view to making it more relevant to students.
- Good use is made of the locality. Recent trips, made accessible to every student, have been to Caldecot Castle, the Black Country Museum and the Civil War Museum in Worcester. There is also much use of the Roman resources in Cirencester and a local study in Cheltenham for GCSE.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management of history is good.

- History is led well, jointly by the head of faculty and the head of subject. An outstanding feature is the collaborative management involving all teachers. The principal outcome is the sharing of innovation which, in turn, has had a positive impact on students' learning. A good example is the introduction in Year 8 of new ideas into the teaching about Native Americans to which students have responded very well.
- All staff have a good idea of the overall strengths and weaknesses in the subject. As a consequence, the plans for history in the faculty development plan are appropriate. Self-evaluation is accurate.

- Senior managers are supportive of the subject. They recognise that parents appreciate the breadth that it brings to the overall school curriculum, strengthening its academic status.

Subject issue: the contribution of history to community cohesion

The contribution of history to community cohesion is good.

- Community cohesion is encouraged in different parts of the curriculum. Good examples are the study of the evolution of democracy, the evolution of workplace legislation and the Northern Ireland conflict. The wider implications of slavery and the Holocaust are also explored. While frequent references are made to the present, staff recognise that more formalised links to the present and to the history of wider British society are desirable.

Subject issue: the development of independent learning in history

The development of independent learning in history is good.

- In lessons, students are given opportunities to undertake different tasks of varying length. In homework, generally as well as GCSE coursework, students show initiative through research and the communication of their findings. Good examples include Year 9's post-war study when students choose their own topic and Year 8's study of Native Americans when they make comparison of two tribes of their choice. However, history staff recognise that independent learning can be taken further. They are pursuing this as part of the school's development of personal learning and thinking skills which is aimed at encouraging students to take even more responsibility for their work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- making the curriculum more relevant to students by taking full advantage of the opportunities offered by the current Key Stage 3 National Curriculum
- further developing the already positive opportunities for independent learning.

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