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Dear Mrs Cameron

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 19 and 20 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, analysis of students' work and the observation of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- Attainment in Key Stage 3 and in GCSE is above average. Attainment at A and AS level is also above average with a bias towards grades B and C. Students make outstanding progress in both Key Stages 3 and 4. In the sixth form, progress is good. To improve it further, the department has introduced new measures, such as more frequent knowledge testing, more detailed monitoring and better use of this information to improve teaching. One example of these changes, seen on inspection, was a Year 13 lesson focusing on peer-evaluation of essays linked to target grades.
- Students' personal development is good. Their increasing mastery of the subject is reflected in improved self-confidence. The impact of the study

topics, such as the history of the civil rights movement, is seen in increased understanding of politics and the human condition.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching is good.

- Teaching is well-planned; objectives are clear and teachers have very good professional relationships with students. Students affirm consistently that teachers are supportive and want them to do well. They appreciate the good range of activities provided in lessons. Assessment is regular and the information very well used to inform both teachers and students. There is a strong emphasis on students' self-assessment which is effective in helping their progress. The quality of marking is good. Good use is made of resources which include laptops for research.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- Its principal strength and guiding rationale is the strong emphasis on chronology in Key Stage 3. Due weight is given to significant topics, such as the First World War, and these are suitably adapted to reflect the multicultural nature of the school. Links with outside agencies are also exploited to ensure the curriculum meets the needs and interests of students. One of these agencies, Creative Partnerships, provides a playwright to explore, with students, the history of local immigrants. Students react well to such initiatives, enjoy learning and progress well as a result. Building on this, the department acknowledges that it can do more to address students' needs. There is a good programme of visits including, for example, Year 9's visit to the battlefields in Belgium.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management is good.

- The head of department has an excellent understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of provision in history. The quality of the department's self-evaluation document is outstanding. As a result, there are effective strategies in place not only to maintain the high standards but also to improve them where necessary. A particularly significant feature is the way in which the three members of staff work closely together thus ensuring that improvements are applied universally. The department benefits from significant support from senior management in the school which values history and the insights it gives to young people.

Subject issue: the contribution of history to community cohesion

The contribution of history to community cohesion is good.

- History provides good opportunities for students from a range of backgrounds to work closely together and, as a result, plays a significant

role in maintaining relations between different groups. In addition, monitoring of the performance of different groups of students ensures that they get the help they need and reflects the school's commitment to promoting equality of opportunity. The Creative Partnerships initiative also helps bring together students from different backgrounds.

Subject issue: the development of independent learning in history

The development of independent learning in history is good.

- Students have lots of opportunities to use their initiative. For example, they are encouraged to prepare presentations on selected topics.
- Homework is used for activities such as computer-based research and, in Year 7, the construction of Norman castles.
- The department has strategies in place to ensure that students are given even more opportunities to ask their own questions, research answers and communicate these in different ways.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing further, ways of ensuring that the Key Stage 3 curriculum tackles topics that students need to know and understand in preparation for adult life.

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