

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



12 February 2010

Mr K Hollins
Principal
Knutsford High School
Bexton Road
Knutsford
Cheshire
WA16 0EA

Dear Mr Hollins

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 2 and 3 February 2010 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, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- Attainment is just below average when students enter Year 7, and above average, though not significantly so, by the end of Year 11. Most groups of students make good progress in Key Stages 3 and 4. The proportion of students attaining the highest GCSE grades has increased in recent years. However, the most able students are not challenged consistently enough in lessons to ensure that all fulfil their potential.
- Attainment by the end of the sixth form is broadly average, but this represents good progress for students, some of whom find the transition from GCSE to AS and A-level courses difficult.

- In lessons, students make good gains in historical knowledge and understanding, though in Years 7 and 8 progress in developing skills and concepts is slow to begin with. Students receive good support in preparing for examinations and ensuring that they meet their targets.
- Students demonstrate good attitudes to learning and work well with each other as well as on their own. They can discuss their individual targets confidently and know what they need to do to meet them. Students behave extremely well in lessons.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- The history department is embedding national strategies' approaches to teaching and learning well. Each lesson begins with clear lesson objectives shared with students and most lesson activities encourage the development of critical thinking skills in debates and discussions. Students said they enjoyed the many opportunities to discuss important issues, such as the causes of wars and their consequences. They also valued the support they received from teachers to help them make good progress.
- Teachers use their history knowledge well to elicit thoughtful responses from students. They allow students sufficient time to respond to questions, which invariably leads to clearly structured answers. There are also good opportunities for students to develop their literacy and communication skills, such as report writing, participating in debates and developing informed views about different interpretations.
- Students' progress is monitored through a well-planned sequence of assessment tasks. In Years 7 and 8, teachers do not yet monitor students' progress in key thinking and history skills as well as they do in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.
- Marking in books is exemplary and all students know exactly what they need to do to meet their targets.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- The school offers a wide range of courses to meet students' different needs, including visits to sites of historical importance. The Key Stage 3 curriculum provides a good introduction to all the required history topics, but progression in skill work is not yet embedded as well as in Years 10 and 11.
- The department has made a number of good links with other subjects, particularly with the other humanities specialist subjects.
- The schemes of work for all key stages, including the sixth form, are clear and detailed and provide a good indication of how knowledge and understanding are to be developed. Improvements are being made to the

schemes for Years 7 and 8. Guidance on effective teaching approaches for stretching the most able history students is limited.

- Students benefit from effective support, including a good revision programme to prepare for GCSE. Some of this GCSE work begins as early as Year 9.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in history is good.

- The history department is led and managed well. There is a good mix of experienced teachers and those who are relatively new to the profession and the school. This has led to a good balance of new and more traditional teaching approaches. Their joint hard work has led to history being one of the most popular subjects in the school. The team works well together and has established good relationships with students.
- Humanities specialist status has played a good part in helping the department to focus on embedding innovations and new approaches to teaching and learning which have led to improvements in achievement.
- The department has a good capacity to improve further. The self-evaluation process is based securely on thorough analysis of results. Excellent performance information, generated by senior leaders, is being used well to identify areas of weakness and to plan improvements.

Subject issue: the contribution of history to community cohesion

The contribution of history to community cohesion is good.

- Teachers have a growing understanding of the requirement to promote community cohesion through history. The department has made a good provision to broaden students' understanding of diversity in the local, national and world contexts. Topics have been identified from across the history curriculum where students are introduced to different cultures and their values. There is some evaluation of the effectiveness of this provision, but this is limited.
- There are good plans to enhance curriculum provision in Key Stage 3 to promote community cohesion further in history.
- Students said they valued the opportunities to discuss controversial and potentially sensitive issues, such as how conflicts arise and how different groups of people have different perspectives of events.

Subject issue: the development of independent learning in history

The development of independent learning in history is good.

- The history department has enabled students to develop their independent learning skills well. Students welcome opportunities to work on their own, or in small groups to plan and present their work.

- Although work in Years 7 and 8 is often tightly structured, students are gradually encouraged to take more responsibility for their own work. This enables students at GCSE and in the sixth form to work confidently on tasks out of the classroom and in their own time. This ensures that the vast majority of coursework tasks are completed well and on time.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that students' historical and critical thinking skills are better developed in Years 7 and 8 and that there is explicit planning for progression in skills and concepts in schemes of work and in lessons
- providing more appropriately challenging tasks for the most able history students.

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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Peter Limm
Her Majesty's Inspector