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Miss C Abbot
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Dear Miss Abbot

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 26 and 27 January 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 10 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is satisfactory.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is satisfactory.

- Students make satisfactory progress with the result that standards are just above average by the end of Year 11. In recent years, girls have made better progress than boys in history, although the gap narrowed significantly in 2009. While achievement is satisfactory overall, not enough of the most able students achieve the highest grades in history.
- Although a minority of A-level students did not achieve their targets in 2009, students currently in Year 13 are making good progress. Well-

considered revisions to the curriculum have been successful in raising achievement.

- Students' good personal development in history makes a significant contribution to their learning. Most students behave well and behaviour is often excellent. On occasions, when the pace of learning is too slow, a small minority of students become distracted and waste learning time.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is satisfactory.

- Teachers are hard-working and passionate about their subject. Relationships between students and teachers are usually good, and more often excellent.
- The most effective lessons are challenging and well paced. Teachers establish high expectations and devise learning activities which are both enjoyable and demanding. Teaching strategies ensure that all students are able to participate in high-quality discussion and teachers regularly check students' understanding.
- However, the majority of lessons do not sufficiently challenge students. Learning objectives and teachers' questioning techniques are not demanding enough. In these lessons, students make only satisfactory progress.
- Teachers use assessment well to ensure that students know what they need to do to improve. They are less effective at using assessment in lessons to gauge the understanding of all groups of learners.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- The curriculum is matched well to students' needs and interests and makes a significant contribution to their enjoyment and progress. Higher proportions of students choose to study GCSE and A-level history than seen in other schools nationally.
- The curriculum is complemented by a satisfactory range of visits, including an annual visit to the battlefields of the First World War. Learning and personal development are enhanced by the annual visit of a survivor from the Holocaust.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is organised well and reflects the expected key concepts and processes of the revised national framework. Appropriate opportunities for assessment are identified. However, opportunities to study British Isles history, local history and change and continuity across different periods are limited.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

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

- The department is organised well and runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. There is an excellent culture of teamwork and staff willingly share resources and lesson ideas.
- Leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the department's strengths and weaknesses and use this to formulate effective action plans.
- Students' progress is now more thoroughly monitored so that strategies can be put into place to support those that are achieving less well.
- Actions to improve boys' achievement at Key Stage 4 and to raise achievement at A level are now having a clear impact.

Subject issue: the contribution of history to community cohesion

The contribution of history to community cohesion is satisfactory.

- Teachers have a clear understanding of the duty to promote community cohesion, although their strategies are not yet formalised or evaluated.
- Students are given satisfactory opportunities to study other cultures, for example through 'India Day' and through their study of the civil rights movement in 20th century America.
- Satisfactory opportunities are also provided to deepen students' understanding of the local community through, for example, their work on the Hull Haven.
- Students' understanding of the wider United Kingdom community is inhibited by their limited knowledge of British Isles history.

Subject issue: the development of independent learning in history

The development of independent learning in history is satisfactory.

- Students are given good opportunities to test hypotheses and support conclusions, particularly in their GCSE and A-level studies.
- All students benefit from opportunities to conduct historical research. This is most effective when they plan their own research, for example when they research 20th century dictators. Sixth-form students are able to engage in historical debate through the school's virtual learning environment.
- Lessons do not yet routinely challenge students to think for themselves, to plan their own learning or to formulate their own conclusions.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the proportions of students achieving the highest grades in GCSE history
- improving the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - ensuring that all teachers make effective use of assessment to plan lessons which are sufficiently well-paced and challenging

- ensuring that teachers develop strategies to check the learning of all students more regularly
- extending opportunities for students to study local history, British Isles history and change and continuity across different historical periods during Key Stage 3.

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