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Mr C Anders  
Headteacher  
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Middle Park Way  
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Dear Mr Anders

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 2 and 3 March 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 five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- All students make good progress from low starting points and, as result, standards are broadly average and rising.
- In the majority of lessons observed, students made good gains in developing their knowledge and understanding.
- Students are becoming increasingly adept at evaluating a range of sources to create well-reasoned arguments. For example, Year 8 students are able to explain the links between health, sanitation and urbanisation in nineteenth century Britain.

- Key Stage 4 students develop good chronological understanding through the study of medicine through time. At Key Stage 3, students' understanding of key historical themes is less well developed.
- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. Students' good behaviour makes a strong contribution to learning and is a notable feature of lessons. Students demonstrate real enthusiasm for history and increasing numbers are choosing to study the subject at GCSE.

### Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Strong relationships between staff and students make a significant contribution to students' progress. Teachers create a very positive and encouraging climate for learning and students speak highly of the care and support they receive.
- A good range of teaching strategies is deployed which successfully secures high levels of engagement from all groups of students. A focus on the development of functional literacy across the school is being used effectively by the department to improve students' extended writing skills. Good use is made of technology to support learning and promote achievement.
- In a large majority of lessons, teachers create good opportunities for students to work in pairs and in teams to develop their historical skills. Occasionally, such opportunities are constrained by overly directed teaching or a lack of high-quality supplementary questions to aid reflection.
- The use of assessment to support learning is good overall. At Key Stage 4, marking consistently ensures that students are clear about the next steps in learning. Students are given regular opportunities to assess their own and each other's work and generally make good use of the department's 'what went well' and 'even better if' approach. At Key Stage 3, the specific history target for improvement sometimes gets lost because the students find it easier to set a functional literacy target.

### Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is satisfactory.

- The Key Stage 4 curriculum is good. Detailed programmes of study have been developed to reflect examination requirements. Some Year 11 students are able to study the excellent enrichment course on local and family history.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is currently in transition and does not yet fully reflect the revised National Curriculum. For example, the department has not yet finalised how it will ensure that appropriate time is given to all aspects of the revised programmes of study within the two-year Key Stage 3 curriculum.

- Appropriate emphasis is given to local history through, for example, the study of Portchester Castle, the Portsmouth workhouse, the development of Leigh Park, and access to local and national archives. These areas of the curriculum are supported by a good range of visits and visitors. Students said how much they valued these opportunities.

#### Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

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

- The subject leader works well with the Head of Humanities. A good understanding of the department's strengths and areas for development is informed by accurate self-evaluation.
- At Key Stage 4, students' progress is monitored regularly and their performance is monitored carefully so that additional support can be put in place when it is needed. The department is aware that these monitoring systems are not yet sufficiently developed at Key Stage 3.

#### Subject issue: the contribution of history to community cohesion

The contribution of history to community cohesion is good.

- Students demonstrate a good understanding and appreciation of tolerance and diversity through their study of the Holocaust, slavery and religious conflict in Ireland. They contribute regularly to assemblies and the school's digital 'Butterfly Broadcast', covering such issues as propaganda, genocide and prejudice. Consequently, they have a good understanding of history's role in deepening their understanding of their own and the wider community.
- The school effectively supports students in developing their sense of local identity. For example, opportunities are provided to evaluate how Leigh Park and its community have changed over time. Strategies to promote community cohesion with regard to the rest of the United Kingdom are currently being developed but are less well-established.

#### Subject issue: the development of independent learning in history

The development of independent learning in history is good.

- The department has a clear understanding and commitment to developing independent learning skills set within a whole-school focus of developing autonomous and resilient learners. The large majority of students are inquisitive and enjoy planning their own learning. Students are able to identify problems to solve and good questions to ask.
- The large majority of lessons observed had good elements of independent learning and there was an appropriate balance of group and individual activities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- maximising the impact of the two-year Key Stage 3 curriculum by:
  - taking full advantage of the opportunities offered by the revised National Curriculum to develop a more sharply focused programme of study
  - extending opportunities for students to study the 'impact through time' of key themes in history
  - ensuring there is an explicit and well-defined approach to planning for progression in subject-specific skills so that teachers and students are able to evaluate progress more accurately across the curriculum.

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

Karl Sampson  
Her Majesty's Inspector