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Ms D Pritchard  
Headteacher  
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Dear Ms Pritchard

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 9 and 10 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 seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- Attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 is above average, with the proportion of students attaining grades A\* or A much higher than average. For the most able students, and for girls overall, this represents good and often outstanding progress. However, less able students and boys sometimes make only satisfactory progress. This is because teachers are not always sufficiently aware of students' contrasting needs.
- Students develop good knowledge and understanding of different historical periods and events. They are skilled at drawing conclusions from a wide range of evidence. Students develop good extended writing skills

through, for example, answering questions such as 'Why were the Romans so successful?' Students have a very good understanding of cause and consequence. They use their good evaluative skills to draw inferences from historical sources and to make sound judgements about the past. Students are less confident in understanding how and why historians differ in their interpretations of the past.

- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. They enjoy history and mostly behave well in lessons. Opportunities to reflect and consider the different experiences of people in the past promote their spiritual and cultural development. Older students recognise the subject's value in helping them to develop wider skills in preparation for work and higher education.

### Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Teachers plan lessons to include a wide range of activities including group discussions, research, the use of video clips and role-play. Occasionally, students are expected to listen to their teacher for extended periods. This sometimes slows the pace of learning and minimises the impact of support staff in accelerating students' progress.
- In some lessons, strategies to promote independent learning skills hinder students' progress in developing their subject-specific skills and understanding.
- While teachers have excellent knowledge of students' achievement, based on good and regular assessment systems, they do not use this information consistently to ensure that lessons fully meet the needs of all learners. Strategies to check the learning of the whole group are not consistently successful.

### Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- The curriculum makes a significant contribution to students' enjoyment in history. Students in both key stages report that they enjoy the course content. Key Stage 4 students particularly value the combination of thematic studies over time and studies in depth which focus on modern history.
- The department has audited schemes of work in Key Stage 3 to ensure that due attention is given to the key processes and concepts set out in the revised National Curriculum. Opportunities to develop understanding of cause and consequence are excellent. Staff are working to provide more opportunities for students to develop their understanding of the significance of events and historical interpretations.

- There are good opportunities to study local history. Students enjoy finding out about Thomas Clarkson's contribution to the abolition of the slave trade and to Suffolk during the Second World War.
- While the investigation into Dunwich over time enables students to build their chronological understanding, thematic approaches to history are not yet fully developed, particularly with regard to the movement and settlement of diverse peoples to, from and within the British Isles, and the development of political power from the Middle Ages to the 20th Century.
- The curriculum is complemented by a satisfactory range of extra-curricular activities, though students commented that they would value a broader range of history visits.

#### Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

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

- The head of department is extremely conscientious. Schemes of work are organised extremely well and reflect excellent understanding of recent revisions to the history curriculum. The department continually strives to improve the quality of provision in history and is proactive in seeking opportunities to collaborate with colleagues within the local authority.
- Systems to monitor the quality of teaching and learning in history are not yet fully embedded. As a result, the excellent practice seen in some lessons is not reflected everywhere.
- The history development plan is well crafted and reflects accurate self-evaluation overall. However, there is insufficient focus on ensuring that all groups of students achieve equally well.

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

The contribution of history to community cohesion is good.

- Students have a good understanding of the history of the local community. Students' commitment to the promotion of human rights is underpinned by their work to investigate events such as the Holocaust, the campaign for women's suffrage and the civil rights movement in 20th century America. Students do not yet have sufficient opportunities to understand the diverse experiences of people living within the United Kingdom today.

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

The development of independent learning in history is good.

- The department is committed to developing students' independent learning skills. In lessons, students benefit from opportunities to speculate, hypothesize and devise their own questions. Independent learning is promoted by regular opportunities for students to conduct research using laptop computers. Many students benefit from opportunities to develop

their independent learning skills through the 'Passport to Learning' projects. This has resulted in some outstanding work. However, the department does not yet monitor the impact of this approach on different groups of learners.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- sharpening the use of assessment information so that staff have a much clearer understanding of the progress made in lessons and over time by different groups of learners
- improving the use of assessment in lessons so that:
  - teachers ensure that learning activities are always well-matched to the needs of the whole group
  - teachers check the understanding of all groups of learners more regularly and adjust their teaching accordingly.

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

Daniel Burton  
Her Majesty's Inspector