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Mr R Cranmer
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Dear Mr Cranmer

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 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 five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- Students' achievements at Key Stage 4 improved significantly in 2009, with the result that attainment is now above average. All groups of students made good progress. Historically, boys have attained less well than girls in history, but in 2009 their attainment was very closely aligned to that of the girls. All groups of students currently in Years 10 and 11 are making good progress and, for some, progress is outstanding.
- At Key Stage 3, students develop good knowledge and an in-depth understanding of historical topics and make good progress in their extended writing. However, they have a limited understanding of key

historical skills and concepts. This inhibits their ability to understand how well they are doing in history or how they might improve.

- History makes a significant contribution to students' personal development. They enjoy history, particularly at Key Stage 4, and the proportion of students opting for GCSE history is significantly higher than that seen in other schools. When teaching is good, behaviour is excellent. Some students become too passive when lessons are dominated by teachers' presentations or teacher-led question and answer sessions.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Lessons are characterised by good relationships between teachers and students. Teachers are passionate and enthusiastic about their subject and have excellent subject knowledge.
- In the best lessons, most commonly seen in Key Stage 4, learning is enhanced through teachers' thorough preparation, recourse to a range of well-prepared resources and a good variety of activities. Teachers communicate very high expectations with regard to the quality of work to be produced.
- In some lessons, students are too passive. A number of Key Stage 3 students commented that they spend significant proportions of lessons sitting and listening to their teacher. This they find frustrating. Too many lessons at Key Stage 3 are characterised by the use of worksheets which provide insufficient challenge and engagement.
- The use of assessment to promote learning is satisfactory. In some lessons, students are required to work at the same pace, regardless of their ability. While Key Stage 4 students have a very clear understanding of their targets for improvement, younger students have a very limited understanding of their current progress in history.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- The Key Stage 4 curriculum is a key strength and makes a very significant contribution to students' enjoyment. Students say they enjoy studying modern history because it helps them understand the world they live in today.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is satisfactory. It provides good opportunities for students to develop in-depth understanding of key historical events and issues. The curriculum also provides good opportunities for younger students to study aspects of local history. Cross-curricular links are developing well. However, the curriculum does not yet promote students' understanding of change and continuity over time or cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, particularly within the history of the United Kingdom.

Planning for progression in history does not yet reflect the key concepts and skills expected in the revised Key Stage 3 curriculum.

- The curriculum is very significantly enhanced by an excellent range of extra-curricular visits and events. Destinations have included the United States, China, Berlin and Auschwitz. A good range of trips is also provided at Key Stage 3, including visits to sites of local interest, such as Oxbrugh Hall and Orford and Framlingham Castles.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

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

- Effective leadership and management have successfully secured good and improving achievement at Key Stage 4. Consistently good teaching now ensures that all groups of students make good progress.
- The head of department has rightly focused on implementing the revised Key Stage 4 curriculum. However, as a consequence, not all aspects of the revised Key Stage 3 curriculum have yet been implemented.
- While monitoring systems are strong at Key Stage 4, they are less well embedded in Key Stage 3. Monitoring information is not yet used with sufficient precision to identify strengths and weaknesses in students' historical understanding. Consequently, it does not yet sufficiently inform curriculum planning.

Subject issue: the contribution of history to community cohesion

The contribution of history to community cohesion is good.

- History makes a significant contribution to the students' understanding of the local community through their study of local castles and other sites of historical interest. The curriculum also ensures that students develop good understanding of the global community through, for example, their study of the Civil Rights Movement in 20th century America. Students' understanding of the wider United Kingdom community is not yet fully developed.

Subject issue: the development of independent learning in history

The development of independent learning in history is good.

- At Key Stage 3, students benefit from many opportunities to conduct independent research in the library and at home. Projects on the slave trade and on Roman life, for example, make a very significant contribution to students' enjoyment. However, students are not yet routinely given opportunities to devise their own questions, or to propose and test hypotheses in their project work. This limits the impact of these very extensive pieces of work in promoting their independent learning skills.

- While some lessons are characterised by investigations and enquiries, in too many lessons, the development of students' independent learning skills is inhibited by too much teacher talk.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring the Key Stage 3 curriculum provides sufficient opportunities to develop students' understanding of:
 - change and continuity across different historical periods, and
 - cultural, religious and ethnic diversity within the United Kingdom
- developing rigorous planning for progression in Key Stage 3 so that students know how well they are doing and how to improve, particularly with regard to key historical skills and concepts
- increasing the proportion of good and outstanding lessons at 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