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Mrs S John  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs John

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 27 and 28 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 seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is outstanding.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is outstanding.

- Standards are above average and rising. All groups of students make at least good progress in each key stage. Girls' achievements are outstanding in Key Stage 4.
- In the majority of lessons observed, students made excellent gains in developing their knowledge and understanding.
- A significant strength in all key stages is the ability of students to assess the value of historical evidence and then communicate their ideas about

the past in excellent extended written work. Students' speaking and listening skills are being developed extremely well.

- History makes an outstanding contribution to students' personal development. Students' excellent behaviour makes a strong contribution to learning and is a notable feature of lessons. Students settle to work quickly and are eager to contribute to lessons. They demonstrate real enthusiasm for history and much higher proportions of students opt to study GCSE history than seen in other schools nationally.

#### Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is outstanding.

- Lessons are characterised by excellent relationships between staff and students. Teachers deploy a wide range of teaching strategies which are markedly successful in securing high levels of engagement from all groups of students.
- In a large majority of lessons, teachers create excellent opportunities for students to develop their thinking skills and take responsibility for their own learning.
- The use of assessment to support learning is good overall. Marking ensures that students are clear about the next steps in learning, although students are not always given sufficient opportunities to reflect on teachers' comments.
- Excellent use is made of information and communication technology to support learning, and the department is at the forefront of the development of the school's online managed learning environment. This provision makes a significant contribution to the quality of learning and is highly valued by the students.

#### Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is outstanding.

- The curriculum ensures that students' awareness of cultural diversity is outstanding. Their understanding of the impact of empires throughout history is developed extremely well and is central to the department's curriculum planning.
- At Key Stage 3, the curriculum is broad, well balanced and meets statutory requirements. However, planning for progression in key concepts and key processes, including sharing the criteria for success, are not yet fully developed.
- At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, detailed programmes of study have been developed which carefully reflect examination requirements.
- An extensive and impressive range of visits and enrichment opportunities for all students lend a real vibrancy to the curriculum. Students said how much they valued visits to sites of historical importance, such as the First

and Second World War battlefields as well as the opportunity to work closely with the National Archives and take part in a summer school at the University of Cambridge.

#### Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

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

- The head of department provides clear direction and rigorously monitors and evaluates the work of the department. She is well respected by colleagues in school and plays a leading role within the national subject association, which she uses deftly to improve provision in school.
- Assessment and target-setting systems are rigorous and used effectively to secure high-quality intervention for any students in danger of underachieving. These systems make a significant contribution to students' progress.
- There is an excellent ethos and culture of team work throughout the department. Teachers are committed to strengthening their expertise and participate in a very wide range of professional development activities.

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

The contribution of history to community cohesion is outstanding.

- Excellent planning to promote community cohesion in history has been informed by a thorough analysis of the school's context. As a result, the curriculum reflects the school's diverse community and is highly relevant to students of all backgrounds. Students demonstrate a superb understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity. They have an excellent understanding of history's role in deepening their understanding of their own and the wider community.

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

The development of independent learning in history is outstanding.

- The department has a clear understanding and commitment to developing independent learning skills. Students are routinely given opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning through enquiry-based approaches to learning. These include opportunities to plan research, suggest and test hypotheses and take risks. Students say how much they value these opportunities.
- The large majority of lessons observed had strong elements of independent learning and there was an excellent balance of group and individual activities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the impact of teachers' day-to-day marking by ensuring that students are given sufficient time to reflect on their teachers' comments
- ensuring there is an explicit and well-defined approach to progression in subject-specific skills at Key Stage 3 to enable teachers and students to evaluate progress more effectively across the curriculum.

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

Karl Sampson  
Her Majesty's Inspector