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Mrs P Wager
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Wager

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 4 and 5 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is outstanding.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is outstanding.

- Attainment by the end of Year 11 is significantly above average with the proportion of students attaining the highest GCSE grades consistently high. All groups of students make at least good progress and a significant number make outstanding progress by the end of Key Stage 4.
- In the sixth form, more students achieve the highest grades than seen nationally, reflecting the outstanding progress that students make.
- In lessons, students make outstanding gains in historical knowledge and understanding. Their outstanding progress in developing skills and their

understanding of historical concepts is well developed across both key stages but is particularly strong at Key Stage 4.

- Students demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and work extremely well with each other as well as on their own. Students behave exceptionally well in lessons.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is outstanding.

- Lesson activities promote the development of critical thinking skills in debates and discussions. Students say they enjoy the many opportunities to discuss important issues, such as the causes and consequences of wars.
- Teachers use their knowledge of history well to elicit thoughtful responses and creative ideas from students. Teachers deploy effective questioning strategies while allowing students sufficient time to respond to questions which lead to well-structured answers.
- Students' progress is monitored through a series of well-planned and standardised assessment tasks. Staff monitor and track students' progress closely in relation to subject-specific targets.
- Marking in books is exemplary. Staff consistently provide students with clear strategies for improvement, thereby ensuring that they know exactly what they need to do to meet their targets.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is outstanding.

- The school offers an excellent curriculum to meet students' different needs, including visits to sites of historical importance.
- The department has made exciting and innovative links with other subjects, particularly English and Drama. Opportunities to develop further cross-curricular approaches with geography, undertaking a local area study for Year 9 students, and are currently in the process of being finalised.
- There are also excellent opportunities for students to develop their skills in information and communication technology (ICT).
- Students benefit from highly effective support, including a very good revision programme to prepare for GCSE examinations.
- The department is in the early stages of investigating the introduction of aspects of GCSE work as early as Year 9 to challenge the more able students who already achieve the higher levels of attainment at Key Stage 3.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is outstanding.

- The history department is led and managed extremely well. The very experienced team of history teachers work well together. Highly effective collaborative working has ensured that lessons are of consistently high quality, resulting in high levels of student enjoyment and engagement.
- The department has fully exploited the school's specialist status as a technology college so that ICT is used to promote outstanding teaching and learning.
- Self-evaluation is informed by rigorous analysis of results and thorough reflection.

Subject issue: the contribution of history to community cohesion

The contribution of history to community cohesion is outstanding.

- Teachers demonstrate excellent understanding of the requirement to promote community cohesion through history. The department has made sound provision to broaden students' understanding of diversity in the local, national and world contexts. Topics have been identified from across the history curriculum where students are introduced to different cultures and their values. The effectiveness of this provision will be evaluated through a recently completed school survey. Strategies to promote community cohesion are fully embedded in all key stages.
- Students say that they value the opportunities to discuss controversial and potentially sensitive issues, such as how justice, democracy and freedom for different groups of people have developed over time.

Subject issue: the development of independent learning in history

The development of independent learning in history is outstanding.

- The history department has enabled students to develop their independent learning skills at the highest level. Students respond positively and enthusiastically to the many opportunities available to work on their own, or in small groups. They plan, present and share their learning with others confidently and sensibly.
- Learning in Key Stage 3 is structured appropriately. Integral to this is the encouragement students receive to take increased responsibility for their own work. This enables students at GCSE and in the sixth form to work with confidence and independence on learning tasks outside the classroom.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- Providing more extra-curricular experiences and opportunities for learning outside the classroom as part of a personalised 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

Keith Worrall
Additional Inspector