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Mr C Davies  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Davies

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 3 and 4 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 you, staff and students; a scrutiny of relevant documentation; an analysis of students' work; and the observation of eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is outstanding.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is outstanding.

- Attainment is high. In recent GCSE examinations, the history results for grades A\* to C and A\* or A are significantly above national averages. Results at advanced level are excellent.
- Students make excellent progress. In Year 11, for example, students have an excellent understanding of developments in medicine in the 19th century.
- At all ages, students write well and for different audiences and purposes. They can evaluate historical sources well.

- Students' attitudes and behaviour are outstanding. They work well together. They are friendly, polite and helpful to each other and to adults.

### Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is outstanding.

- Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge well to extend students' knowledge and understanding. They offer good challenge in oral questioning and give excellent written feedback, especially to those preparing for examinations.
- Learning is briskly paced. Activities are planned well and challenge students of all abilities. However, specific learning outcomes for different groups of students are not always explicitly identified in the teachers' day-to-day planning.
- Information and communication technology is used well at the start of lessons to impart knowledge and to stimulate discussion.
- Teachers are hard working and students value the dedication of the staff.

### Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is outstanding.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced, and meets requirements. Overall planning for the revised Key Stage 3 curriculum is being implemented well. Much hard work has gone into it to ensure that students are offered high-quality learning which will enhance their progress.
- At Key Stage 4, students find the 'Medicine through time' course highly enjoyable. They are enthused by the related visits to the Science Museum and St Thomas' Hospital in London.
- Work in school is supported by some rich learning experiences outside it. In addition to the examples above, students undertake in-depth work on the local Great Central Railway and visit its museum. However, the range of extra-curricular experiences is currently narrow.
- Some excellent links exist with the science department which enrich students' experiences in history. The impact of the specialism in science is evident through the use of relevant resources. Science staff also accompany Key Stage 4 students on their annual visits to London.

### Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

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

- The head of department provides strong and committed leadership. She knows the strengths and weaknesses of the department well through regular evaluation of its work. Appropriate priorities for improvement have been identified. There is a relentless culture of high expectations and this has led to the excellent outcomes in the subject.

- A rigorous system for monitoring students' progress has been adopted. Appropriate action is taken when individual students are underachieving.

Subject issue: the contribution of history to community cohesion

The contribution of history to community cohesion is good.

- Students are offered good learning opportunities to develop their knowledge of their community. They have an awareness of how, for example, the local coal mining industry developed.
- Students' understanding of cultural diversity is strongly promoted through the study of the Islamic empire, the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the impact of the British Empire, including immigration to the United Kingdom.
- The department has started to evaluate its work in relation to this aspect more rigorously and it has built up good links with other subjects, including geography and religious education.

Subject issue: the development of independent learning in history

The development of independent learning in history is outstanding.

- Students are able to plan and conduct high-quality research, especially in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. In Year 12, for example, students conducted excellent research on the impact of the Weimar Republic in Germany in the early 1920s.
- Some students work at length on computers. They can interrogate websites and download relevant information with little adult supervision.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- strengthening the planning of lessons by ensuring that specific learning outcomes are routinely set and evaluated more regularly for the different groups of students
- broadening the range of extra-curricular activities, including inviting more speakers into school.

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 the local Learning and Skills Council and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Champak Chauhan  
Additional Inspector