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Mr G Aldridge
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Dear Mr Aldridge

Ofsted 2010-11 subject survey inspection programme: history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 11 and 12 May 2010 to look at work 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 eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is satisfactory.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is satisfactory.

- Attainment is above average at all key stages. Students make good progress at Key Stage 3 but satisfactory progress at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Current estimates of performance, however, indicate that achievement is improving.
- At GCSE, the proportion of students gaining grades A* to C is above average and in 2009 the proportion of girls gaining the higher grades was high. However, the proportion of students gaining grades A* to A is below average and there is scope for many more students to gain the highest grades.
- The attainment profile of students entering A-level studies is lower than is typical of sixth-form students nationally. Those in Year 12 find the transition from GCSE to AS challenging. In response to this, the

department has sensibly reviewed its entry requirements for the A-level history course.

- Students are developing a good knowledge and understanding of topics studied. They have good enquiry skills, can evaluate sources and explain the significance of people and events in history. They are also developing a good understanding of different historical interpretations.
- Students are aware of the benefits of studying history and can explain why the subject is important in their academic and personal development. In the words of a Year 13 student, 'studying history opens your mind'.
- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. Students like history and enjoy the lessons. Relationships between students and with teachers are good. Exercise books and folders show commitment and enjoyment, and displays celebrate students' work and achievement. Students have positive attitudes to learning, behave well in lessons and work well together and on their own.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is satisfactory.

- Although teaching is satisfactory, half of the lessons observed during this visit were good.
- Teachers are well qualified and enthusiastic. They have good subject knowledge and a clear understanding of examination requirements. However, teachers are sometimes too keen to pass on their knowledge to students and do not prompt them to work independently.
- Lessons are well planned and students understand what is expected of them. At Key Stage 3, teachers employ a variety of approaches which contributes to students' engagement and enjoyment.
- Students taking examination courses feel well supported and appreciate the advice and guidance given by teachers. However, some students, especially boys, feel overwhelmed by the material provided in the support packs, particularly as it is largely text-based with few activities to help focus students' revision.
- Although lessons have pace, teachers tend to try to cover too much in a lesson, talk too much and 'spoon-feed' students. As a result, lessons become rushed, opportunities to allow students to debate and reflect upon what they are learning are missed, and students become reliant upon the teacher.
- The needs of students with special education needs and/or disabilities are considered but those of higher-attaining students are not fully met. This is because the level of challenge is limited and overall expectations are not high enough.
- The department is introducing more opportunities for students to use information and communication technology (ICT) in their learning. However, at present, the use of ICT is underdeveloped.

- Marking is helpful and provides students with effective guidance. Books are marked and praise is given when appropriate. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, students are given detailed advice. However, at Key Stage 3, comments on students' work are sometimes too generic and subject-specific advice is missing.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is satisfactory.

- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements. Schemes of work are currently being revised to focus on key questions. However, local history is underdeveloped.
- Students enjoy the curriculum at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, not least because they are encouraged to make connections between what they study and events today. As they point out, this helps to make history relevant.
- Cross-curricular links are developing, particularly with literacy and citizenship.
- History has contributed to the whole-school 'Magnet Days' on Climate Change and more recently on the forthcoming football World Cup in South Africa. However, no other enrichment opportunities are provided. Students could explain how their learning in other subjects benefits from visits and visitors and were disappointed that they had not been given these opportunities in history.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

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

- The head of department is dedicated, thoughtful and committed to maintaining the high regard for his subject in the school. He is enthusiastic and keen to impart this enthusiasm to the students who appreciate his hard work and that of the other history teachers.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and the department has identified strengths and priorities for further improvement. However, progress to improve provision has been slow.
- The department runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Teachers benefit from teaching in adjoining rooms, cooperate well and readily share good practice.
- Schemes of work for Years 7 and 8 provide a general outline of what should be taught, focusing on themes, concepts and processes. However, they are incomplete and the revision of the scheme of work for Year 9 from September 2010 has yet to be undertaken. Furthermore, there are no detailed schemes of work for the examination courses at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. These inadequacies help to explain why teaching is uneven and why achievement at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is only satisfactory.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving achievement at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form
- developing teaching strategies, including the use of ICT, to meet the needs of all students so that they take more responsibility for their learning and have more opportunities to discuss and reflect on what they are learning
- ensuring that the curriculum at Key Stage 3 includes opportunities to study local history
- developing enrichment activities
- developing detailed schemes of work at all key stages

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 under the URN for your school. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Michael Maddison
Her Majesty's Inspector