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Mrs S Adamson
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Adamson

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 5 and 6 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 outstanding.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is outstanding.

- Attainment is high and students make excellent progress at all key stages. In GCSE examinations, for example, the history results for grades A* to A and A* to C are consistently well above national averages.
- Students have an excellent understanding of the topics they study. They explain their ideas clearly in discussions and in their written work, and provide a wide range of evidence to support their opinions.
- Historical skills are well developed. For example, students have excellent chronological understanding and they evaluate sources confidently. Both younger and older students have an excellent grasp of significance in history. They also have a first-rate understanding of why historians have different interpretations of individuals and events and why this is important.

- Students value the broader skills history provides in preparation for future employment and they can explain the subject's importance in their personal and academic development.
- History is an extremely popular subject at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form and it makes an outstanding contribution to students' personal development. Students have positive attitudes to learning, take pride in their work, and work well together. In the words of one Year 8 student, 'history is cool'.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is outstanding.

- Teachers are adept at using their excellent subject knowledge and classroom expertise to provide stimulating learning opportunities which engage students and help them to make outstanding progress. Their dedication is much appreciated by the students.
- Lesson planning is exemplary and the needs of all students are carefully considered. Relationships are excellent and students appreciate being given time to reflect on their learning.
- Teachers create many opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning. Students say how much they enjoy lessons because the exercises and tasks encourage them to take an active role in their learning. This helps them to make excellent progress.
- A range of assessment techniques is used effectively to monitor students' progress and help them to improve. Marking is first-rate at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form and ensures that students are clear about what they have to do to improve.
- The use of information and communication technology (ICT), by teachers and students, is underdeveloped. Students report that they would value more opportunities to use ICT in lessons.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is outstanding.

- At Key Stage 3, the curriculum is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements. The revision of the curriculum is being implemented well and teachers have successfully ensured that the new schemes of work provide students with high-quality learning which enhances their progress. However, opportunities to study local history are not fully exploited.
- Students enthuse about the curriculum at Key Stage 4, particularly the work on the American West and on 'Medicine through Time'. As a result, they look forward to lessons, engage enthusiastically in their learning and make outstanding progress.
- Sixth-form students are highly motivated by their courses at AS and A levels; not least, as they point out, because they have the opportunity to choose whether to study aspects of Tudor England or 19th century Britain.

This element of choice also helps to explain why attainment is high and achievement is rising.

- Cross-curricular links are highly effective. The promotion of students' literacy skills, for example, is extremely well developed in all year groups, and using the correct historical terminology is an important and successful feature of lessons.
- History contributes significantly to the school's strategies to promote community cohesion. This is notably achieved at all key stages through the work to broaden students' understanding of the impact of diversity and of historical developments throughout the British Isles.
- There are a number of enrichment activities for students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Students talk animatedly about how these activities strengthen their learning. However, the range of extra-curricular opportunities at Key Stage 3 is, currently, rather narrow.
- The outstanding curriculum, together with outstanding teaching, enables students, not only to make excellent progress, but also to make thoughtful comparisons across time and to reflect perceptively on the relevance of the subject.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

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

- The acting head of department provides clear leadership. In the short time in which she has been in post, she has successfully maintained the subject's excellent reputation within the school community. Plans for further improvement are based on effective self-evaluation.
- The department is extremely well organised and runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis.
- There is a rigorous system for monitoring students' progress. Examination results are closely analysed and appropriate action is taken to ensure that high standards of attainment are maintained.
- The department has an excellent ethos. Teachers are passionate about the subject, have high expectations and work closely as a team, sharing their ideas as a matter of course and seeking always to improve their practice. This supportive and collaborative approach makes a significant contribution to the subject's popularity in the school and to students' outstanding achievement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that there is an explicit and well-defined approach to using ICT in history lessons to promote learning and progress
- ensuring that the new curriculum at Key Stage 3 includes more opportunities to study local history
- developing additional enrichment activities.

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