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Mr K Hollins  
Executive Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Hollins

### **Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: history**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 8 and 9 November 2011 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 without their consent.

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 good.

### **Achievement in history**

Achievement in history is good.

- Achievement is good across all key stages. Results in national tests are generally above average and the quality of learning and progress is good in lessons and over time. Although GCSE results dipped in 2011, an analysis of current performance demonstrates that concerns are being successfully addressed.
- In the large majority of lessons observed, students made strong gains in developing their knowledge and understanding.
- Key Stage 4 students develop good chronological understanding through the study of medicine through time. At Key Stage 3, students understanding of key historical themes is less well developed which in turn limits their understanding of change and continuity over time.

- Strengths were seen across all key stages in students' ability to evaluate a range of sources to reach well-reasoned conclusions. For example, Year 13 students worked together well to sift a complex range of modern and contemporary sources to construct a sophisticated understanding of how and why interpretations of The Pilgrimage of Grace have changed over time.
- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. Students are passionate about history and value the subject's role in helping them to understand the world around them. The numbers that choose to study history beyond Key Stage 3 are impressive and significantly well above the national average.

### **Quality of teaching in history**

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Teachers create a very positive and encouraging climate for learning and students are particularly appreciative of the range and quality of support that they receive from their teachers.
- Strong subject knowledge is used to plan learning activities which engage students well and incorporates new technologies to support learning and promote good achievement.
- Where teaching is at its best, activities are skilfully presented as dynamic opportunities to be explored and investigated with students engaged as partners in the learning process. They are encouraged to steer learning by developing ideas of their own and extending their historical skills. Occasionally, too much teacher talk militates against time for reflection and the pace of learning is slowed.
- The use of assessment to support learning is good overall. Marking ensures that students are clear about the next steps in learning. However, opportunities are missed to engage students in refining and developing their analytical and discursive writing skills so that they are consistently challenged and supported to reach the highest grades.

### **Quality of the curriculum in history**

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum offers good opportunities to study topics in depth and ensures that students develop an understanding of key historical concepts and processes.
- Students studying history to GCSE and A level benefit from a curriculum that provides good range and depth. A variety of resources are used effectively to support students' progress. For example, the sixth form curriculum is enhanced by the use of articles and books by leading academics which supports students in articulating increasingly sophisticated examination responses.
- Older students reported how much they appreciate the increased emphasis given to developing examination technique and its importance in

developing their understanding of how to secure their individual target grades.

- The curriculum is enhanced by strong provision for enrichment which is underpinned by strong partnerships with The National Trust, Stoke Museums and Galleries and The Prince's Teaching Institute. Students are able to complement their historical studies with hands-on experience as members of the acquisition committee for the National Museum of Childhood as well taking on the role of working exhibitors, artists, actors and presenters across an excellent range of community arts-based projects.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in history**

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is good.

- The subject leader provides good leadership, clear direction and maintains high expectations of staff and students. His understanding of the department's strengths and areas for development is informed by effective self-evaluation and supported well by internal support and external review. For example, strategies to raise attainment in A level history have been markedly successful thanks to excellent partnership work undertaken with a neighbouring school.
- The subject leader's response to underperformance at Key Stage 4 in 2011 has been timely, comprehensive and well-targeted. Students' progress is monitored regularly and their performance is carefully monitored so that additional support can be put in place when it is needed. As a result, current Year 11 students appear to be on track to achieve their challenging targets.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- further developing the Key Stage 3 curriculum so that there are extended opportunities for students to study the 'impact through time' of key themes in history
- ensuring that students routinely use feedback to develop the quality of their analytical and discursive writing so that they are consistently challenged and supported to reach the highest grades.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop history in the school.

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

**Karl Sampson**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**