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Mrs Mathieson  
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Dear Mrs Mathieson

Ofsted survey inspection programme - History

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 11 December 2007 to inspect 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 made included: visits to classes, interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation including examination results, and a review of a sample of students' work.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Standards and the progress made by students vary between key stages.

- In Key Stage 3 standards are average but the progress made by students is good because their ability in history when they begin at college is below average. The ability and progress of some Key Stage 3 students is very much better than this overall judgement. For example, the ability of a good number of Year 7 students to write quickly and coherently about Beckett was striking. Girls do better than boys.
- In Key Stage 4, standards have fluctuated year-on-year. This year GCSE results have been substantially better than last but they remain below average. However, the progress made by these students given their starting points is satisfactory. Girls again out-perform boys.

- In the sixth form in the 2007 examinations, the two candidates at A-level did very well. In AS examinations, the results were less successful raising, in part, the wisdom of entering some students for the examination.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Efforts made by the department to improve teaching and learning are now beginning to have an impact, for example, in Key Stage 3 where teachers are encouraging students to take more responsibility for their learning and are using the improved range of assessment data more effectively to target work more appropriately to suit students' abilities. Most students interviewed were clear on their targets and how to improve.
- Teachers are well qualified and very enthusiastic about the subject.
- Marking is informative and regular within the college's three week cycle.
- The quality of learning is satisfactory. It has the potential to be better, in particular as students are given more responsibility for their own learning. In Key Stage 3 and amongst A-level students it is already good. Students enjoy history; they find it interesting and fun. Their behaviour in lessons is exemplary.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- In Key Stage 3, it provides sound content as well as experience of key historical concepts and skills. In Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, it covers examination specifications effectively.
- Given the college's stated aim of addressing the Every Child Matters agenda, the curriculum is not yet relevant enough in terms of explaining the background to the world in which students live.
- There is a reasonable amount of history learning outside the classroom – for instance, Year 13 students visiting Auschwitz, and Key Stage 4 are involved in a community based project to construct a time line.

### Leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management is good.

- The current management has identified weaknesses and introduced changes since the last Ofsted inspection which are now having substantial impact. This is most obviously seen in terms of outcomes in Key Stage 3 which are now being carried through into Key Stage 4.

- At the heart of the improvements is a very thorough self-evaluation system which includes the careful use of data and the production of a self-evaluation report followed by subsequent amendments to the departmental development plan. The effectiveness of amendments is then assessed in the next self-evaluation round.
- The main impact of this has been on the quality of teaching and learning and the willingness of teachers to innovate and become more aware of students' needs.

## Inclusion

Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are well-supported in history classes. The differences in performance between boys and girls continue to be carefully monitored with appropriate action to address issues. Provision for gifted and talented students is too limited and warrants attention. The college has made a good effort to support students recently arrived from the newer European Union in history.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed included:

- continuing efforts to address weaknesses behind the GCSE results
- ensuring the relevance of what is taught, thus supporting the college's Every Child Matters policy
- improving provision for more able students.

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

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term and made available to the team for the next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Paul Armitage  
Ofsted Specialist Adviser for History