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| **QM Historical Association Quality Mark Final Report** | | | |
| Visit to: Mount School, York | | Date: 12.6.14 | |
| Context:  The Mount School York is a Private Sector Girls School situated in the heart of the City of York. The school’s students achieve high outcomes at both GCSE and A’ Level. The A Level results are the highest in the City and GCSE outcomes including English and Maths are well above the National Average. The History Department, although small, makes a significant contribution to the school’s overall performance. Results are amongst the highest compared to other subjects.  As a Quaker School the Department’s work is informed by and enriches a strong ethos and heritage. The Headteacher took time out from meetings to talk to the Assessors about this. The outreach work and partnerships formed by the Department are very much a ‘strength of the School’, not just the Department. The Headteacher made it very clear that this success is achieved by the dedication, hard work, vision and commitment of the teachers in the Department. | | | |
| 1. Teaching and Learning:   The Assessors agreed that the evidence meets the Quality Mark Criteria for ‘Gold’.  Students enter the school from a wide range of backgrounds. This means that that KS2 data associated with State schools is often not available. However, the Department uses reading age scores, MIDYIS and a range of personalised assessments to closely monitor progress. There is a range of ability, but the focus of the Department is to use their detailed knowledge of each student to support progress. As a result of this, student’s books show them making effective progress, and observations evidenced the use of AFL and written feedback to support student’s understanding of key concepts and knowledge.  The Assessors observed lessons from KS3 and KS4. Three lessons were observed; Poppies and Pacifism (Year 7), Emit Till (Year 9), and ‘Teenagers in Britain were rebels without a cause’ (Year 10). Both Assessors agreed that that most of the practice observed fell into the ‘Gold’ criteria for the Quality Mark.  All teaching was well planned and based around enquiry questions that were well judged and thought provoking. Students were highly engaged throughout their lessons. Teachers used a wide range of strategies to build interest, develop knowledge and extend students critical thinking. For example, Year 7 students built their own display using a range of sources. The lesson was carefully structured so that although highly accessible, students had to work collaboratively using their prior knowledge and source handling skills to produce an appropriate title for their display which was evaluated by other groups. The teachers used skilful questioning to enable students to explore their own thinking in greater depth and pose their own historical questions throughout.  It is clear that students strongly value the teaching of History. In discussion they were able to articulate this, particularly within the context of specific learning experiences. Students feel very well supported and that their ‘voice’ is not only heard, but used by teachers to inform planning and subsequent learning. Students commented upon the ‘passion’ their teachers have for the subject, and how this motivates them. They like the fact that they are not constrained by having to produce the ‘right answer’, but that all thinking is valued. Students were also very clear about the significant impact the wide range of learning activities has on their learning. They pointed to the high quality of Local History projects, active learning in the classroom and role play.  However, both Assessors agreed that the Department could spend a little time explicitly exploring the ‘purpose’ of History with students and that some learning would be more effective if time was devoted to exploring the wider historical context with students. | | | |
| 1. Curriculum:   The Assessors agreed that in both its content and approach to curriculum development practice met the Quality Mark Criteria for ‘Gold’.  The programmes of study for all key Stages are designed to meet the needs of students within the context of a Quaker School. Teachers are well aware of current reforms and have responded to these positively. The curriculum is both broad and balanced with a range of Depth and Period studies covering wide ranging, but coherent historical content. “We never let the ink dry” epitomises the Department’s approach to curriculum development, always reflecting on practice in order to continually improve.  The commitment to using an enquiry approach at KS3 and the approaches to teaching at KS4 and KS5 all promote and foster a balance of developing knowledge, skills and understanding. Observations clearly evidenced the importance the Department places on the effective development of second order concepts.  Local Study and special projects, including opportunities to work across the curriculum, provide significant enhancement to students’ experience of history education. The range of these is particularly impressive as is the levels of student participation.  The Department has fully utilised opportunities to extend the amount of time students spend in the History Department. Curriculum time for history is good.  The Department has a view of the curriculum in the round, regarding “A level as beginning in Year 7”. They have identified and taken effective steps to support students through key transitions, particularly between KS4 and KS5. The Department works closely with the SENCO to support students, and we saw specific examples of this support. For example, a student with dyslexia described how a more visual approach to learning and additional time outside of lessons had enabled her to make progress. Discussions with the SENCO confirmed the impression that the Department is truly inclusive. | | | |
| 1. Achievement   The Assessors agreed that the achievement of students met the Quality Mark Criteria for ‘Gold’.  Students achieve well against a number of measures. Although progress data based upon KS2 Levels are largely unavailable; by comparison to other subjects, against National Averages, MIDYIS, through internal RAG tracking, and from looking at student’s work, it is clear that they make outstanding progress.  Teacher’s excellent subject knowledge and awareness of progression, together with a forensic knowledge of their students learning/progress, result in high quality interventions that enable students to make sustained progress. This can be seen in lessons and clearly emerges from conversations with students and teachers.  Lively display work in and around the Department celebrates achievement, although the school’s Quaker ethos of ‘being the best we can be’ guides practice generally and within lessons.  Teacher’s careful planning plays a key part in students making exceptional progress. In the Year 10 lesson observed, students critically analysed and evaluated a complex set of sources. This was facilitated by the structure of the lesson, appropriate resources and carefully probing questioning. In this case, as in much of the Department’s work, teachers set the bar high and have an expectation that students take responsibility for their own learning. However, this is achieved within carefully ‘scaffolded’ activities and a context of outstanding relationships between teachers and students. | | | |
| 1. Leadership   The Assessors agreed that the leadership of the department met the Quality Mark Criteria for ‘Gold’.  Leadership within such a small Department tends to be informal. Teachers work together extensively and mutual support is seen in all aspects of the Department’s work. In this sense the leadership could not be more ‘distributed’.  However, this is not to take away the highly effective leadership of the Head of Department. Her described her leadership as having, ‘rekindled my passion for the subject. This has enabled me to progress to leading my own department in another school’.  The Head of Department has taken a lead in establishing and maintaining partnerships with other schools and institutions across the City of York. This collaboration has benefitted the Department in terms of curriculum developments and students access to an outstanding enrichment programme.  As already cited, the Department ‘s SEN provision is highly beneficial to students and this aspect of the Department’s work is coordinated by the Head of Department. A number of parents have praised the support received by their children.  The pressures of leading a small Department although different from that of a larger organisation are no less demanding. The fact that the subject enjoys such a high profile in and beyond the school is a testimony to the quality of its leadership. | | | |
| 1. Enrichment   The Assessors agreed that enrichment was a particular strength of the Department and exceeded the Quality Mark Criteria for ‘Gold’.  The classroom facilities are light and spacious. The room is full of student’s work and many of the displays are used as part of day to day learning. Students are used to being out of their seats and using the space actively.  The range, depth, quality and impact of the Department’s enrichment activities is a real strength of the school. The activities range from: Local studies of Medieval , Tudor and 19th century York, linked to modern citizenship issues. Interviewing D Day veterans in a joint project with other schools in York. A First World War Battlefields tour. A German exchange visit, planned and delivered by students exploring ‘how we teach WWII’. Master classes for Years 9-13 with local State secondary schools. The ‘Peace and Passivism’ project drawing on the schools Quaker ethos and local history. A project with York Minster telling the story of the women of Empire.  The activities students are engaged in include; role plays, poetry and other cross curricular work with the English Faculty. Students’ success in these projects has been recognised at a national level and this has led to students presenting their work at national venues.  This work can be seen in the enthusiasm students have for history education at their school. Our discussions with students became particularly animated when they described their involvement in these projects. This enthusiasm spills over into their classroom activities and it is hard to fully convey the outstanding nature of this work within the context of this report!  The Department uses ICT to support student’s learning. It has developed its own Blog to foster and support independent learning. However, whilst the Department has achieved as much as it can on its own, it would greatly benefit from a more effective ICT platform such as Moodle to support learning more effectively. | | | |
| 1. Other | | | |
| Final Comments:  As this was the first Assessment of the Pilot the Assessors spent all day at the school and would like to thank the school, teachers and students for the welcome they received. Due to the time of year the Assessors were restricted in the range of lessons that could be observed. | | | |
| Award made? Yes/No  Level: Silver/Gold | Date of Award: | | Renewal Date |