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| **QM Historical Association Quality Mark Final Report** | | | |
| Visit to: Millthorpe School, York | | Date: 8 October 2014 | |
| Context:  Millthorpe is an average sized 11-16 secondary school situated in the west of the city of York. The school population is mainly White British with small numbers from minority ethnic groups and pupils for whom English is an additional language. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average as is the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs.  The history department consists of four staff with a joint head of department arrangement. From an open option choice at Key stage 4 approximately 50% of the pupils opt for history. GCSE attainment for the past three years has been well above the national figures and rising, with progress measures better still. In 2014 there were consistently good outcomes across all three teaching groups. | | | |
| 1. Teaching and Learning   The department’s portfolio provided very clear evidence of meeting the criteria for ‘silver’ and the observations of lessons in both key stages confirmed that teaching and learning is securely good with a range of outstanding features. The clear strength of the department is the collaborative nature and dialogue between the four subject specialists whose respective qualities complement each other well. Enquiry based approaches are at the heart of everything the department does. All classrooms, and the adjoining corridors, provide a stimulating learning environment including pupils work, evidence from recent visits and a current whole school focus on local individuals from the First World War.  In the lessons observed levels of challenge were high with pupils expected to handle demanding texts and sources, and teachers using high quality subject specific language. Pupils were expected, and responded, to tasks and teacher questions with extended answers both verbally and in written form. The department has invested considerable time in meeting the needs of EAL pupils through the provision of support materials in French and Polish.  Pupils are clear about the purpose of history and its value as a subject but are less aware of the underpinning second order concepts such as change, causation, and interpretation and how these contribute to progression in history. Pupil voice interviews were exceptionally positive and bear testimony to the high quality of teaching. There were a wide range of aspects of history that pupils particularly enjoyed including specific topics on slavery, Hitler’s Germany, a debate comparing Dresden and Hiroshima, research homework on the Battle of Hastings, drama and role play activities, and “the freedom to talk about things”. Other comments to be celebrated include pupils who said “teachers really push you to get to your potential”, “the department is not elitist – you have a level playing field in history” – testimony to an inclusive approach, and one pupil who opted for GCSE history because “my teacher inspired me.  There are good examples of pupils developing as independent learners and teachers work hard to develop the skills of research, use of sources and extended writing. Pupils reported that they would like more opportunities to carry out independent work and work on pupil initiated themes within the courses taught.  Marking and feedback is extremely thorough across all year groups and teachers invest significant amounts of time on this activity. Pupils generally understand the points for development identified in their feedback in terms of improving knowledge and understanding, extended writing, and source work. More specific feedback on the development of second order concepts would bring about similar improvements in these areas. | | | |
| 1. Curriculum   The department’s development of its curriculum is currently in a state of flux and the assessor’s agreed with its self-evaluation of meeting the criteria for ‘silver’.  The department is very aware of significant changes that will take place to GCSE. They are quite correct in not wanting to invest significant development time into Key Stage 3 as they want to take a five year overview of the curriculum to ensure progression and continuity. In addition the department is looking to extend this perspective into Key Stage 2 and A Level through discussion with partner schools.  The current Key Stage 3 curriculum is strongly focused on an enquiry based approach to planning. The content reflects the point of development with units such as “What is history?” at the start of Y7 still being taught; and work on Britain between the end of the medieval period and 1750 being taught in part of the summer term in Y7. There are appropriate opportunities to study local history throughout key stage 3. The department will need to ensure that progression of the second order concepts is built firmly into future planning. | | | |
| 1. Achievement   The assessor’s judged this aspect overall as meeting the requirements of “silver’ but with elements of ‘gold’ already in place. Across the department pupils make progress that at the very least meets high expectations and in some cases exceeds targets derived from Fischer Family Trust ‘D’ estimates. Lessons are challenging and interviews with pupils clearly demonstrated that they were aware of how they were being challenged. The whole school tracking system provides detailed evidence of the resulting progress across each year and teaching group.  Pupils acquire good knowledge and understanding of the topics they study and are particularly well prepared for the types of questions they encounter on GCSE papers. | | | |
| 1. Leadership   This is the strongest aspect of the department and contains a range of ‘gold’ standard criteria. The department leaders complement each other in their joint leadership roles and have an accurate view of their strengths and areas for development. Nothing was raised on the day of the assessment that they were not aware of. The department have the capacity to deal with all of the points that require the step up to gold.  The school is supportive of their applications to attend subject specific CPD and there is clear evidence of new ideas and approaches being fed back to the department and integrated into existing practice. The department is thoroughly well organised and this is recognised by senior leaders who use the department as an example of good practice within the school. The skills of the two joint subject leaders complement each other and there are very positive relationships between members of the department who share a collective responsibility to the development of the subject.  Parental feedback about history provision is very positive and endorses the work that they do. The following sample of comments provides a flavour of the feedback – “A brilliant, pro-active and creative department”, “Our child has been enthused by history”, and “History is Emma’s favourite subject, I think largely because it has been brought alive by her teachers”. The department acknowledges that work with the media is an area that would benefit from further development. | | | |
| 1. Enrichment   The assessors felt that the department met the criteria for ‘silver’.  Individual classrooms and the surrounding corridors contained good displays of information on historical topics including WW1, Ireland, medieval life, the Armada, and JFK; and reports of visits including Berlin and the battlefields. In addition each classroom contained good displays of pupils’ work. The department does have information on the website alongside all other curriculum areas and there are a range of links to other subjects which result in enrichment activities including Holocaust Memorial Day and the WW1 research topics.  The department is aware that further enrichment through developing wider community links would enable them to meet the gold award. | | | |
| 1. Other   The assessor’s felt that the requirements for achieving gold were well within the reach of the department and they could be capable of achieving it inside the timescale set out for renewal. | | | |
| Final Comments:  The history department at Millthorpe is an exceptionally hard-working, dedicated and professional team who know their strengths and areas for development clearly. Through these qualities they have rightly earned the respect of senior colleagues, pupils and parents and deserve to be the second school in the country to receive the Quality Mark. | | | |
| Award made: Yes  Level: Silver | Date of Award:  8th October 2014 | | Renewal Date  October 2017 |