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Miss K Rhodes
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Rhodes

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 11 November 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- Standards in history are average overall. However, this statement hides the fact that in each year group there is a very wide ability range. There is a good number of pupils who are gifted and talented as well as a high percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities of varying kinds.
- Pupils make good progress. For example, in the Early Years Foundation Stage, very young children were beginning to understand time by talking about and drawing different generations in their families. In another example, Year 5 pupils on their own initiative, researched and wrote projects on the background to Remembrance Day. Particularly impressive was the way they were able to talk about the issues of war and draw parallels with the present.

- Pupils' personal development is good. Good examples were seen in all three lessons inspected. Thus, in Year 3, listening to visiting residents, pupils learnt a lot about the thoughts and feelings of local people in the recent past; in Year 6 they learnt of the terror experienced by the Frank family in the Second World War; and in Year 1, they learnt how material lives have changed through the study of old and new objects. In all three history lessons, behaviour was outstanding.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- During the past year, teachers have worked hard to improve pupils' progress. As a result, in history, expectations are now clear, objectives more precisely stated, and lessons are generally planned tightly and paced well. Pupils are now given many opportunities to think for themselves although, rightly, teachers feel that this still requires further development.
- These developments in history are visible in all year groups including history-related work in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Pupils' work is assessed regularly at the end of each unit and at the end of the year. This information is used to inform further teaching. A good example of this is the way in which it is being used to identify those pupils who are gifted. The school currently organises activities for them but is seeking ways to provide even more opportunities for them in class.
- Support in class for pupils with special educational needs is good. Teaching Assistants are deployed very well.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- Just as the school has been busy improving teaching, staff have also worked hard to improve the history curriculum. It is thematic and designed to focus on topics that are relevant to pupils in the present. Themes interlink with other subjects, including citizenship, and there is a strong emphasis on literacy which the school is keen to improve generally.
- Expectations regarding pupils' progression have been defined; there are clear success criteria for each thematic unit. There is a good emphasis on historical skills.
- A very good key feature is that staff regard the curriculum as 'organic' in that they are ready to change it on a regular basis. For example, staff acknowledge that the planned units do not provide a clear enough overall chronology for pupils and so they are monitoring carefully how chronology is tackled in their teaching.
- The curriculum is supported well by visits to different historical locations and visitors come to the school; for example, the Blitz Experience for Year 6 pupils run by a visiting theatre group. Other history resources are used very well.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

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

- Senior leaders have achieved a good deal in the past year, radically changing almost every aspect of the way in which history is taught in the school. The changes are ongoing and their effects are increasingly visible in the quality and style of teaching, and in the progress of pupils.
- As a result, the school has a realistic, thoughtful and exciting future development plan for the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the curriculum to strengthen relevance even more and to consider overall chronology
- finding more ways to make pupils responsible for their own learning
- providing more in-class opportunities for pupils who are gifted.

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

As I 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. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Paul Armitage
Additional Inspector