

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs Ann Constanti
Interim Headteacher
Mission Grove Primary School
Buxton Road
Walthamstow
London
E17 7EJ

Dear Mrs Constanti

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 29 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.

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

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- Pupils' attainment by the end of Year 6 is broadly average. This represents good progress given pupils' low starting points.
- Pupils in all years have excellent knowledge and understanding of topics studied in depth. Older pupils have a good sense of chronology and are able to explain how different periods in history fit together.
- Pupils are less confident in their understanding and application of subject-specific skills, such as historical enquiry, using and evaluating evidence and understanding different historical interpretations.
- The high proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language make good progress because teachers plan well to meet their needs.

- History makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development. They enjoy history and almost always behave extremely well. They respond particularly well to opportunities to share ideas with their talk-partners. On occasions, when the pace of learning becomes too slow, some pupils become less attentive.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Teachers' planning is extremely detailed and ensures that the skills of additional staff are utilised well to support learners who need extra help. Carefully prepared resources ensure that all pupils can access the work, including those at the early stages of English language acquisition.
- Teaching is imaginative and makes good use of resources to deepen pupils' understanding of the past, for example, through popular songs from the Second World War and through the use of artefacts from Inca society. Younger pupils enjoy role play which helps them understand what it was like to be, for example, a Roman soldier.
- In some lessons, pupils have to spend too long listening to the teacher before getting down to their work. Teachers do not ensure that all learners share their ideas in feedback sessions in lessons, either through their talk-partners or in small groups.
- While marking is completed conscientiously, it is not sufficiently effective in accelerating progress in the development of pupils' subject-specific skills. Pupils do not have a good grasp of the component parts that constitute effective learning in history. As a result, they do not know how well they are doing in history or how they can improve.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- Although the school has recently introduced an integrated curriculum, staff have ensured that history has retained its integrity as a discrete subject and also benefits from good cross-curricular links.
- The curriculum is tailored well to reflect pupils' diverse heritage. For example, good links are made between Victorian England and nineteenth century India. Black history month enjoys a high profile in the school and is enjoyed and celebrated by pupils in all year groups.
- The curriculum is enhanced by a good range of visits to places of local interest and to museums such as the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Imperial War Museum. Some pupils benefit from the opportunity to visit sites of historical interest in Sicily.
- There is currently insufficient planning for progression in the development of pupils' historical knowledge, skills and understanding.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

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

- History enjoys a very high profile in the school; it is well regarded by pupils and well served by a dedicated team of teachers. The subject leader benefits from excellent support from senior managers. Provision for history is extremely well organised and non-specialist staff report that they receive good support from colleagues with regard to teaching ideas and resources.
- Leaders and managers track pupils' progress in history and have a clear understanding of which groups attain most and least well. Target-setting is realistic and suitably challenging. However, pupils' progress in achieving these challenging targets is undermined by the lack of clarity in planning for progression in the development of pupils' subject-specific skills.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing strategies to plan for progression in pupils' subject-specific knowledge, skills and understanding
- ensuring that marking enables pupils to understand better how well they are doing in history, what they need to do to improve and how to do it.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector