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17 March 2011

Mr R Ward
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Ward

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 8 March 2011 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.

- Pupils make good progress in history and attain standards that are above average. Younger pupils can describe and explain aspects of life in Ancient Egypt, while older pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of Britain since the 1940s.
- Pupils have good enquiry skills. From an early age, they are encouraged to be inquisitive and they enjoy asking questions and undertaking independent learning enquiries. They have a wide historical vocabulary and use key historical terms accurately.
- Pupils' understanding of chronology is being developed well and older pupils are able to sequence images of homes in the past accurately. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 also have a good understanding of the wider subject-specific skills such as historical interpretations. They can explain the work

and significance of important figures in history, such as Martin Luther King.

- The contribution of history to pupils' personal development is outstanding. They are enthusiastic learners, enjoy discussion and have an excellent general knowledge. They work well individually and in groups. They recognise that it is important to learn about the past because, in the words of a Year 6 pupil, 'history helps us understand the present and we need to know how things have evolved'.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Lessons are planned well and based on clear learning objectives which are shared carefully with the pupils. Teachers use a range of activities to motivate and engage pupils and displays are used well to celebrate pupils' achievements.
- Teachers have high expectations. They ask probing questions, encourage discussion and give pupils time to think and reflect on what others say. This helps to explain pupils' good achievement.
- The needs of lower attaining pupils are considered consistently well and teaching assistants give good support.
- Teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) well. However, it is underused by pupils. The school is aware of this and plans are in place to improve facilities and increase opportunities for pupils to use computers for research and for presenting their work.
- Pupils' work is marked and comments are evaluative and encouraging. However, the comments do not always give sufficient subject-specific advice on how they can improve their work.
- Assessment in history is in transition and for the first time pupils' work is being assessed according to National Curriculum levels of attainment. Baseline assessments have been undertaken. However, teachers do not have a clear enough understanding of how well pupils' subject-specific skills are improving. This is because assessment is not yet sufficiently developed to inform teachers and pupils of how well pupils are doing.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- An appropriate cycle is in place in which pupils explore a range of topics each year. Some significant gaps between historical studies are bridged by using opportunities to explore the past in other topics. Teachers are aware, though, of the importance of ensuring that the subject retains its identity and integrity within the curriculum framework.
- Effective cross-curricular links are in place and historical issues are explored across the curriculum. Literacy is developed well in all year

groups in history and opportunities are regularly taken to link with other subjects, for example with art, drama, and design and technology.

- The curriculum is enriched by an excellent range of visits to places of historical interest, such as Arbeia Roman Fort and the Head of Steam Railway Museum at Darlington. These events are linked closely to the schemes of work and to activities in the classroom. Pupils can explain how all these activities help their learning and they say how much they enjoy the visits.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

Leadership and management in history are good.

- Self-evaluation is accurate and based on a good range of information including scrutiny of teachers' planning and pupils' work, lesson observations, and discussions with teachers and pupils. The action plan has appropriate objectives.
- History is well organised in this small school and resources are used wisely. For example, the school actively exploits local museums and learning centres to borrow artefacts which are used to reinforce learning.
- The subject coordinator provides good support for her colleagues and teachers work well as a team.
- Links with neighbouring schools have helped teachers to update their knowledge and understanding of some of the more recent developments in provision in history. However, professional subject-specific training for teachers in history has been limited.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing marking and written feedback to ensure that pupils are given precise subject-specific advice on how they can improve their work
- developing further assessment practice to facilitate more accurate awareness of pupils' development of subject-specific skills
- providing more opportunities for pupils to use ICT in their work
- making more use of local networks to help staff update their knowledge and understanding in history through relevant professional development.

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

Michael Maddison
Her Majesty's Inspector