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Mr D Gregory  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Gregory

### **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 with Janet Thompson HMI on 30 and 31 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 their historical learning and some make outstanding progress. Pupils in Key Stage 2 can describe and explain about the life of Anne Frank, those in Key Stage 3 can talk in some detail about developments in transport, and those in Key Stage 4 have a good knowledge and understanding of the life of the Plains Indians.
- Although much time is spent on building timelines, pupils' understanding of chronology is undeveloped. They are able to sequence images of homes in the past accurately. Their responses to questions about the images showed that they are thoughtful and perceptive and are making good progress in developing their ability to analyse and infer. However, their ability to locate some of the topics they studied in relation to each other was weak.

- Pupils could identify similarities and differences between pictures from different periods and could explain why people and events they had studied are significant in history. However, the full range of historical skills is not being developed and monitored fully. For example, older pupils struggled to explain how evidence might be checked for accuracy.
- History makes an outstanding contribution to pupils' personal development. They behave well in lessons and work well together and on their own. They are well motivated in their learning, enjoy asking questions and undertaking enquiries, and are keen to engage in discussion. They recognise that it is important to learn about the past so that, in the words of one student in Key Stage 2, 'you weren't there so you need to know what happened before you were born so you can learn things from the past'.

### **Quality of teaching in history**

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Teachers understand pupils' needs well and engage their interest successfully through a range of exercises, tasks and practical activities. This helps to explain their good achievement.
- Lessons are planned in considerable detail, carefully structured, and based on clear learning objectives.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well by teachers to show video clips and to display learning activities. Pupils use ICT well for research and they become increasingly accomplished at using computers for enquiries and for presenting their work.
- Personalised support ensures that pupils' individual needs are considered consistently well. Teaching assistants give good support but occasionally support is too focused on completing the tasks set rather than developing pupils' ability to work things out for themselves and learn from the processes involved.
- Assessment is used well by teachers to add to their understanding of pupils' progress and to inform future planning. Teachers confidently use P levels and National Curriculum levels to assess pupils' work. However, links with teachers in other schools by which standards and progress might be checked are undeveloped.

### **Quality of the curriculum in history**

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced, and appropriate cycles, in which pupils explore a range of topics each year, are in place at each key stage. There is a clear emphasis on developing historical skills and understanding as well as knowledge.
- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is in the process of revision. Planning is at an early stage but the school is aware of the importance of creating a curriculum which provides an appropriate balance in the range and

content of topics to be studied, develops through overviews, themes and in-depth studies, and attracts the interest of all groups of pupils.

- The recently introduced Entry Level course at Key Stage 4 provides challenge and an appropriate level of accreditation for pupils.
- The emphasis on 'doing history' and on practical activities helps to make lessons memorable and meaningful.
- Cross-curricular links are strong. However, the school is aware of the importance of ensuring that the subject retains its identity and integrity, for example, by ensuring that personal, learning and thinking skills are located securely within an historical context.
- The curriculum is enriched by an excellent range of visits to places of historical interest, such as the American Museum in Bath, Bath Spa Station and Longleat House. Pupils say how much they enjoy the visits and they can explain how these activities help their learning. However, not all visits are linked closely enough to the schemes of work and to activities in the classroom.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in history**

Leadership and management in history are good.

- Self-evaluation is detailed and leaders have a good idea of strengths and areas for development. They also have a good understanding of how the subject can be set in a broader context of developing pupils' overall knowledge and skills. Pupils' views are surveyed and considered in planning.
- Team spirit is strong and teachers and teaching assistants work well together.
- Schemes of work are thorough and supportive and the monitoring and recording of progress is detailed. Development plans are relevant and clear.
- Resources are used wisely. For example, the school actively exploits local museums and resource centres to borrow artefacts which are used to reinforce learning.
- Links with neighbouring schools are effective but these have not yet been fully exploited to improve provision and outcomes in history.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- further developing pupils' chronological understanding so that they have a more secure map of the past
- ensuring that all staff understand the importance of developing, as appropriate, the full range of historical skills which is essential for the future independence of all pupils
- ensuring that the revised curriculum at Key Stage 3, while remaining interesting and fun:

- reflects the national requirements
- provides an appropriate balance in the range and content of topics to be studied
- develops through overviews, themes and in depth studies
- sets out clearly how pupils will make progress in developing their subject-specific knowledge, skills and understanding in lessons and over time
- attracts the interest of all groups of pupils.

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**