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Mrs V Morris
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Morris

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 3 May 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 one history lesson.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- Pupils make good progress and attain standards that are above average.
- They show a good knowledge and understanding of aspects of life in the past. For example, Year 4 pupils had a firm grasp of the process of mummification in ancient Egypt and understood its purpose. Year 2 pupils could explain how the Great Fire of London started and why it spread so rapidly.
- Pupils have a good understanding of chronology. Year 4 pupils sequenced images of homes in the past accurately and older pupils understood that the intervals between periods studied vary and could position images appropriately on a timeline.

- Pupils use historical sources effectively to make appropriate deductions. Year 6 pupils showed a firm grasp in discussion of the wide range of historical sources underpinning study in the subject.
- History makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development. They enjoy this subject and appreciate their teachers' efforts to 'make it come alive'. Older pupils in particular expressed how much they value the opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning in exploring aspects of the past, for example in current work on Britain in the Second World War.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Teachers successfully seek to engage pupils' interest through practical activities and a good range of visits and visitors.
- Good opportunities are provided for pupils to investigate aspects of the past for themselves within a suitable framework of guidance.
- In the lesson observed, pupils responded well to the opportunity to work in groups on aspects of the Blitz in Britain in the Second World War, showing considerable maturity and good concentration. They shared their findings efficiently with others working on the same aspect. The teacher ensured that learning proceeded at a brisk pace through careful attention to the time allocated for the different parts of the lesson.
- Teachers assess pupils' attainment at the end of each unit using key objectives underpinning the work. Pupils value teachers' oral guidance on how to improve their history work, although written comments are more commonly focused on aspects of literacy than on historical skills and understanding. Written comments on more substantial pieces of work within each unit, including indications of how pupils might improve their work, are not consistently provided.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- Appropriate cycles are in place. These set out history-focused topics as well as others with opportunities for exploring the historical dimension and whole-school topics, such as castles and Devon, where there is a significant element of history. These arrangements make a good contribution to continuity in pupils' historical learning.
- Planning for history topics is thorough with good links made with other subjects where appropriate. Work in history makes a positive contribution to the development of pupils' literacy skills and is a frequent context for literacy lessons.
- The range of enrichment activities is good. Pupils particularly enjoy the full days on aspects of history, for example the visit by 'Claudius' the Roman legionary and the recent Egyptian day.

- Progression in historical skills and understanding is established through staff discussions of their planning and of examples of pupils' work. The school has correctly identified the need to set out a clear progression to inform the planning of work more closely and this is a key priority in the current school development plan.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is satisfactory.

- In this small school, the subject's development is appropriately a shared endeavour. Staff value the place of history in the curriculum and work closely together in planning activities and discussing ideas and examples of pupils' work. Unavoidable staff absences over the last year have constrained the recent impact of this approach.
- Monitoring activities are carried out by the headteacher and have focused mainly on the core subjects and on religious education in this church school. Nonetheless, there is a broadly accurate view of strengths and areas for development in history arising from cooperation between staff.
- Teachers' assessments provide a clear view of pupils' attainment but further analysis, for example to explore pupils' performance over time, is not routinely carried out at present.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- providing more subject-focused help for pupils on their developing skills and understanding when giving written feedback
- making more systematic use of assessment information to compare pupils' performance in the subject over time.

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

Grahame Sherfield
Her Majesty's Inspector