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Mrs H Webber
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Webber

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 1 July 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 two lessons, including a visit to Millom Folk Museum to observe pupils in Years 5 and 6 researching the life of Norman Nicholson, a local poet and writer.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- Pupils enter Year 3 with below average attainment in history. Pupils of all levels of ability make good progress in all years to reach broadly average standards in the subject by the end of Year 6.
- In Years 3 and 4, pupils are beginning to interrogate evidence and talk confidently about the home front during the Blitz and the reasons for the evacuation of children. They make good progress in reinforcing their understanding the need for rationing during the Second World War. Their chronological skills are developing well and they complete accurate timelines on a range of historical topics.
- Pupils in Years 5 and 6 make accurate comments on the difference between truth and opinion and are aware that some sources cannot

always be trusted. They make links between aspects of Victorian history and the life of Norman Nicholson, whose life they are researching on the internet and also during visits to the local folk museum. They have a good understanding of the nature of evidence and of how historians use source material to make their judgements.

- Pupils' personal development in history is good. They speak highly of the subject and also of their teachers. They behave well and are engaged in their learning. They particularly enjoy the Learning in Depth (LID) initiative, when, in their words, 'We can find things out for ourselves and work on topics that really interest us.'

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Relationships between pupils and between pupils and the adults who work with them are good. Challenge in lessons is realistic and pupils of all groups tackle assignments which meet their learning needs well. For example, more able pupils are enabled to reach the higher National Curriculum levels as a result of detailed questioning which requires them to justify their answers. In addition, good support from teaching assistants ensures that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities can play their full part in classroom activities. As a result, these pupils make the same good progress as their peers.
- Provision for information and communication technology is outstanding and pupils use computers, including sophisticated software, with a skill which belies their years. They present their work in a variety of ways using new technology and the quality of their multimedia presentations, on the Middle Passage for example, is high. The multi-sensory room, which comprises both vertical and horizontal electronic whiteboards and a 'surround sound' system, is used particularly well to immerse pupils in the past, for example when they experience a virtual bombing raid on London in 1940.
- Assessment is satisfactory but improving. The school recognises that tracking systems to monitor pupils' progress against National Curriculum levels need further development. Marking is regular and accurate but is variable in quality. Pupils themselves say that they do not always receive sufficient advice on how they can improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- History is taught as both a discrete subject and also as an integral element of cross-curricular themes, in science for example. It has a high profile in school, reflected in the good quality of display on corridors and in classrooms. Curriculum planning is good and has pupils' acquisition of historical skills and also their particular interests as its starting point.

- The LID project in Years 5 and 6 is a major aspect of curriculum delivery and pupils use a range of sources, including the internet, to research topics which fire their imagination, the history of Cumbrian castles for example. The opportunities for pupils in lower Key Stage 2 to enhance their research and investigatory skills are, however, underdeveloped.
- There is a good range of enrichment activities to motivate pupils, to reinforce their learning and to complement the school's emphasis on the study of the local area. Pupils take part in a Victorian experience at Muncaster Castle and make regular visits to Millom Folk Museum.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is good.

- Self-evaluation of the effectiveness of provision in history is good and the school has an accurate view of strengths and areas for development in the subject. Time is built into staff meetings to discuss performance in history and focused lesson observations ensure that good practice in teaching and learning is shared across the school.
- The history curriculum is continuously under review. Teachers work successfully to ensure that history retains its discrete status but also continues to be a major element in cross-curricular themes. They feel well supported and express the view that there is a corporate approach to the development of history provision. For example, the use of 'Mindware' software facilitates joint planning and enables staff to see how the history action plan relates to whole-school priorities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- further develop strategies to track the progress pupils make in history across the school
- provide pupils with even more opportunities to develop their research and investigatory skills, particularly in Years 3 and 4.

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

Jim Kidd
Additional Inspector