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Mr P Cotter
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Cotter

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 27 June 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; observation of four lessons; and short visits to a further two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is outstanding.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is outstanding.

- Pupils make outstanding progress which results in high attainment by the end of Year 6.
- Pupils' knowledge and understanding of topics studied in depth are excellent. Their sense of period is strengthened through constant exposure to artefacts and other primary sources of evidence in lessons and well-conceived opportunities for cross-curricular working.
- Pupils have highly developed subject-specific skills. They are keen and adept historical enquirers and are skilled at devising good-quality questions to inform their investigations. Pupils have excellent understanding of how historians find out about the past and use their own evaluative skills to make judgements about the relative value of different types of historical evidence. Pupils articulate very confidently their well-

considered opinions, for example, on whether Britain was right to pursue a policy of appeasement in the 1930s.

- History makes an outstanding contribution to pupils' personal development. They enjoy history enormously and behave extremely well in lessons. Pupils respond purposefully to the many opportunities that they are given to discuss their ideas in pairs and in groups. History makes a very significant contribution to pupils' preparation to live in a diverse society, particularly through the work undertaken during Black History Month.
- Older pupils understand and can articulate why history is an important subject. In discussions, Year 5 pupils said that history is important because it 'helps us learn from our mistakes'. All agreed, however, that sometimes we do not learn enough from our mistakes.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is outstanding.

- Teachers are highly imaginative in their use of resources and create lessons which pupils find exciting and intriguing. In one lesson seen, Year 3 pupils were mesmerised, as they entered the classroom, by a life-size replica of an Egyptian mummy. In another lesson, pupils enjoyed handling artefacts purportedly from Tudor times as they tried to deduce why Henry VIII divorced Catherine of Aragon and married Anne Boleyn.
- Teaching consistently challenges pupils to think for themselves and to draw their own conclusions. In Year 2, for example, pupils devised an excellent range of questions to ask when using their imaginary 'history telescopes' to investigate Victorian seaside holidays.
- Very occasionally, the lesson objectives shared with pupils are not precise enough, reflecting broader curriculum aims instead of a tangible goal that pupils can easily understand. This, occasionally, results in some pupils being confused about what it is, precisely, that they are trying to find out.
- Marking is highly effective and, as pupils move into the older years, focuses well on the development of pupils' subject-specific skills, particularly with regard to their evaluation of historical evidence. Pupils are routinely encouraged to respond to their teachers' marking, either through making corrections, improving their work, or responding to a challenging thinking question posed by the teacher.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is outstanding.

- Schemes of work articulate extremely clearly how the curriculum will develop pupils' subject-specific knowledge, skills and understanding in lessons and over time. As a result, all staff understand very well what pupils are expected to achieve and what pupils need to do to raise their attainment further. This helps to explain why lessons are so purposeful and why they secure consistently good or outstanding progress.

- The curriculum is enhanced by an excellent range of educational visits which is integrated fully with learning in the classroom. For example, in one Year 6 lesson, pupils were prepared extremely well for their visit to Chelsea Football Club Museum by activities designed to strengthen their understanding that museums are historical representations that should be questioned and challenged.
- The history curriculum is strengthened through links with other subjects. Historical texts and fiction feature heavily in the school's guided reading curriculum. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of the Victorian era are deepened through their work in literacy, where they study extracts from Sherlock Homes and Charles Dickens before devising their own Victorian detective stories. Pupils deepen their understanding of the ancient civilisations through numeracy, for example, by studying the use of symmetry in Greek art and the biographies of Ancient Greek mathematicians.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is outstanding.

- The subject is extremely well organised. Excellent curriculum planning is matched by the sharing of very high-quality teaching resources to help secure consistently good and often outstanding teaching.
- Teachers, particularly those new to the profession, receive excellent support from the subject leader, and benefit from joint planning, team-teaching and regular formal and informal feedback.
- Provision has also been enhanced through training for all staff in planning for progression and using assessment in history. The subject leader has worked with another local school to garner and share best practice.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and enhanced by the school's commitment to keeping up-to-date with the latest developments in history teaching.
- Appropriate assessment systems are in place to ensure that staff have a good understanding of how well pupils are doing in history. However, analysis of pupils' attainment does not give the subject leader a clear enough view of the skills which pupils are developing best and those which need further attention. This hinders the effectiveness of improvement planning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- sharpening systems of assessment so that leaders and managers have a clearer understanding of pupils' subject-specific strengths and areas for improvement so that improvement planning has even more impact.

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

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector