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Mr A Russell
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Dear Mr Russell

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 20 September 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, pupils and members of the local history society; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- Attainment in history is above average and pupils make good progress in developing their knowledge and understanding of different historical periods. For example, younger pupils could describe and explain what they had learnt about changes in transport. Older pupils talked accurately and confidently about life during the Second World War.
- Pupils are developing good enquiry skills. They appreciate being asked at the start of a topic what they know and what they would like to find out. Older pupils commented that this made history more interesting.
- However, there is unevenness in the development of the full range of pupils' historical skills. For example, pupils were unsure about how evidence might be checked for accuracy and how history can be interpreted in different ways. In addition, although they could accurately sequence images of homes in the past, pupils' understanding of the

passage of time, and especially interval and duration, was less well developed.

- The contribution of history to pupils' personal development in history is outstanding. They are extremely well motivated, thoughtful and curious about the past. They enjoy asking questions and say that 'history is fun'. They are convinced of the importance of learning about the past because, in the words of an older pupil, 'only by studying the past can we improve our own lives'.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Teachers develop good relationships with pupils and enjoy teaching history. This helps to explain pupils' interest and engagement with their learning.
- Learning activities are planned well to meet the needs of all pupils through a variety of challenging tasks. Lessons are lively and pupils talk enthusiastically about their ideas.
- Good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT). Teachers use digital projectors and whiteboards well and pupils enjoy using ICT for research and for creating their own presentations.
- While marking is positive and includes helpful comments, it is not fully effective in helping pupils understand precisely how they can improve their work in history.
- Linked to this is the underdevelopment of assessment procedures. As a result, teachers do not have a clear enough understanding of how well pupils are developing the full range of subject-specific skills. This explains why some pupils are less confident in evaluating historical evidence than they are in undertaking historical enquiries.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets requirements. Pupils explore a wide range of topics each year which enables them to learn about important aspects of local, national and world history.
- The curriculum is being revised with a focus on themes which will incorporate discrete subjects within a cross-curricular structure. Teachers recognise the importance of making sure that the subject retains its identity and integrity within the emerging curriculum framework.
- Visit and visitors are an important part of the curriculum and the opportunities provided for pupils are outstanding. Places regularly visited include Eden Camp, Hadrian's Wall, Beamish Museum and the North Yorkshire Railway. Links with the local community, especially those with the local history society and the York Archaeological Trust, are excellent.

Pupils say how much these visits and activities help their learning and, in the words of one Year 6 pupil, 'bring history to life'.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is good.

- You work closely and effectively with the subject coordinator to develop history across the school and together you demonstrate a clear commitment to the importance of history in the primary curriculum.
- Although only in role for a short space of time, the subject coordinator has demonstrated good capacity to develop the subject more widely. Effective self-evaluation results in a good understanding of the subjects' strengths and areas for development. As a result, the subject action plan has appropriate objectives.
- History is well organised and well resourced. Planning is thorough in all year groups.
- Professional subject-specific training for teachers has not taken place for several years. The school is in the process of making links with a neighbouring high school. However, such collaboration has not yet been exploited to update teachers on some of the more recent developments in the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- focusing more extensively on interval and duration when developing pupils' chronological understanding
- ensuring that pupils' wider historical skills are more thoroughly developed across the school and that pupils' progress in the development of these historical skills is assessed more consistently and monitored and evaluated more rigorously
- developing marking and written feedback to ensure that pupils are given precise subject-specific advice on how they can improve their work
- making further use of local networks and clusters to ensure that staff update their knowledge and understanding in the subject through relevant professional development.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop history in the school.

As 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Michael Maddison
Her Majesty's Inspector