

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs G Denham-Hale
Headteacher
St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
Marsh Road
Burnham-on-Crouch
Essex
CM0 8LZ

Dear Mrs G Denham-Hale

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 October 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.

The overall effectiveness of history is satisfactory.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is satisfactory.

- Pupils develop good knowledge and understanding of the topics they study in depth. Older pupils describe life in Britain during the Second World War accurately and with confidence. Younger pupils can explain how railway transport has changed over time. Pupils' sense of period is deepened through good provision for enrichment and cross-curricular working.
- Pupils' attainment across the full range of historical skills is less secure. While they are beginning to develop good skills of historical enquiry, recent improvements to curriculum planning have not had time to have sufficient impact in securing the necessary gains across the full range of subject-specific skills.
- History makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development. Pupils are extremely enthusiastic about history. They are able to explain why

history is important. As one pupil said, 'it's important to know what happened before we were born'. History plays a particularly strong role in helping pupils develop a sense of personal identity, through opportunities to compare their own history and the history of the local area with the different histories of those outside their immediate community.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is satisfactory.

- In the lessons seen, teachers' and pupils' enthusiasm for history made a significant contribution to pupils' progress. Teachers' high levels of commitment to history are reflected in their painstaking preparation of resources which enhance pupils' sense of period. Teachers make good use of technology to enhance learning. For example, in one Year 2 lesson seen, pupils were intrigued to see a film recreating a seventeenth century kitchen.
- Consistently good use of display is made in classrooms to help pupils identify what they already know and what they would like to find out. Learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage is enhanced through the use of high-quality displays which help to strengthen pupils' understanding of change and words to do with the past.
- However, while there is good teaching, teaching overall is satisfactory because it is not always sharply enough focused on developing pupils' subject-specific skills in history. Occasionally, progress is hindered by a lack of clarity in teachers' planning with regard to what, precisely, is to be achieved. When this happens, pupils busily engage in a range of interesting activities but make only satisfactory progress because the purpose of each activity does not link sharply enough to a clearly defined goal. On other occasions, pupils' progress is hindered by too much teacher talk. This results in all pupils having to work at the same pace and to the same standard for too much of the lesson. In these instances, while behaviour remains good, some pupils become less attentive.
- Teachers' use of assessment to support learning in history is satisfactory and improving. While teachers make summative judgements about pupils' attainment in history, strategies to refine their understanding of how well pupils are developing each of the subject-specific skills in lessons and over time are not fully embedded.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is satisfactory.

- History has a high profile in the school and is much enjoyed by staff and pupils. The curriculum is enhanced very significantly through good opportunities for enrichment. These include an extensive range of trips to museums and places of historical interest together with opportunities to participate in workshops run by older members of the local community and adults with expertise in particular aspects of history.

- The history curriculum contributes significantly to pupils' personal development, for example, through participation in annual Remembrance Day commemorations. More able pupils benefit from enrichment through the 'Monday Club'.
- Leaders and managers recognise, however, that planning for progression in the development of the full range of subject-specific skills is not embedded. As a result, the curriculum has not ensured that pupils develop each of the component parts which make for effective learning in history equally well. This explains why imaginative teaching ideas seen in lessons do not always lead to sufficiently rapid gains in achievement.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is good.

- Leaders and managers have responded well to changes in cohort sizes by devising a well-planned curriculum which ensures suitable coverage of a good range of topics.
- Well-established links with local organisations, such as the museum service and the local library, have been established and make a significant contribution to pupils' enjoyment and achievement.
- Accurate self-evaluation ensures that leaders and managers have good knowledge and understanding of the strengths of history in the school and the areas in need of improvement. The school has recognised the need to strengthen curriculum planning to secure progression across the full range of history skills and has been proactive in seeking external support to help develop this aspect of provision.
- While assessment systems are in place, procedures for moderation are not fully embedded. As a result, assessments of pupils' attainment in history are not sufficiently robust.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- fully embedding recent strategies to strengthen planning for progression in history to:
 - accelerate achievement and attainment across the full range of subject-specific skills
 - secure consistently high-quality teaching which is sharply focused on developing pupils' skills in each of the component parts which make for effective learning in history
 - strengthen teachers' and pupils' understanding of how well pupils are doing in history and what pupils need to do to develop their subject-specific skills.

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

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector