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Ms L Moore
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Ms Moore

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 5 December 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 scrutiny of a number of corridor and classroom displays. History was not being taught on the day of the visit but a learning walk was taken covering all classes.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- Attainment in history is broadly average and by the end of Year 6 pupils of all abilities make good progress in developing their knowledge and understanding of features of life in different periods. For example, younger pupils could describe and explain about the life and work of Florence Nightingale. Older pupils spoke confidently and knowledgeably about the work they had undertaken on Victorian times and on comparing different civilisations.
- Pupils have good research and enquiry skills. Older pupils noted that undertaking independent enquiries in history helped to make the subject more interesting.

- Pupils' chronological understanding is being well developed and older pupils have a good understanding of sequence, interval and duration. However, there is some variation in attainment across the full range of historical skills. For example, pupils are unsure how historical evidence can be evaluated, interrogated and interpreted in different ways.
- The contribution of history to pupils' personal development is good. They are well motivated and eager to participate in discussion. They enjoy history which they say is 'exciting'. They have clear views on the importance of studying the past because, in the words of an older pupil, 'we learn from history what's changed and how it's changed, and that helps us to improve how we live'.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Although no teaching was observed, discussions with pupils and scrutiny of work revealed that the work that they are required to do is generally challenging and that it is amended to meet particular needs.
- Teachers are keen to engage pupils, and displays celebrate pupils' achievements and the range of activities adopted.
- Although pupils receive detailed written feedback on their work, the comments do not always include targets which incorporate precise sufficient subject-specific advice. As a result, pupils are unclear on how they can improve in history.
- Pupils' work is assessed each year according to National Curriculum levels of attainment. However, assessing progress in subject-specific skills is underdeveloped. 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 helps to explain why pupils are less confident in evaluating, interrogating and interpreting historical evidence than they are in pursuing 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 an appropriate range of topics each year which enables them to learn about important aspects of local, national and international history.
- Cross-curricular links are strong. Literacy is developed well in all year groups in history and opportunities are regularly taken to link with other subjects, such as art, music, and design and technology.
- The curriculum is being revised to make it more creative. Teachers recognise the importance of making sure that the subject retains its identity and integrity within the emerging curriculum framework.
- Pupils benefit from a good range of enrichment activities. Places regularly visited include Eden Camp and Beamish Museum. There are strong links

with Hartlepool Museum and with the National Archives. These events are linked closely to the schemes of work and to activities in the classroom. Pupils say how much these visits help their learning.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is good.

- The subject coordinator leads the subject with skill and provides good support for her colleagues. Teachers work well as a team and there is a common sense of purpose.
- History is well organised and well resourced. Planning is thorough in all year groups.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and the school has a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in history. The action plan for history has appropriate objectives.
- Apart from collaboration with the National Archives and Hartlepool Museum, professional subject-specific training for teachers in history is underdeveloped. The school is a member of a local partnership. However, it has not yet exploited this collaboration to improve further provision and outcomes in history by updating teachers on some of the more recent developments in the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that there is an explicit and well-defined approach to progression in the full range of historical skills to raise standards and enable teachers to plan for progression more rigorously
- developing marking and written feedback to ensure that pupils are given precise targets which incorporate subject-specific advice on how they can improve their work
- making 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