

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



24 February 2012

Mrs A Blakey
Headteacher
St Benet's Roman Catholic Voluntary
Aided Primary School
Fulwell Road
Sunderland
SR6 9QU

Dear Mrs Blakey

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 20 February 2012 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 four lessons. A learning walk was also undertaken to look at displays in the school and a visit was made to the Early Years Foundation Stage classrooms.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- Pupils of all abilities make good progress over time in acquiring knowledge in depth about the topics they have studied and by the end of Year 6 attainment in history is above average.
- Pupils are extremely enthusiastic about history. Younger pupils, for example, were animated in their descriptions of the life and work of Florence Nightingale. Older pupils explained confidently and knowledgeably about the work they had undertaken on the impact of war on civilians during the Second World War.

- Pupils chronological understanding is being developed well and older pupils have a good understanding of sequence, interval and duration. Their understanding of the full range of historical skills, however, is underdeveloped. For example, pupils are unsure how historical evidence can be evaluated, interrogated and interpreted in different ways.
- Pupils enjoy undertaking research and they are becoming effective enquirers. Older pupils commented that this helped to make history more interesting.
- The contribution of history to pupils' personal development is good. They are well motivated and say that history is 'fun'. Older pupils are clear on the importance of studying the past because in the words of one pupil, 'if we didn't learn about history we wouldn't know why the world is like it is and that's wrong'.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Lessons are carefully planned and learning is matched to meet the needs of all pupils.
- Teachers enjoy teaching history and in turn this helps to explain pupils' interest in the subject. Displays celebrate pupils' achievements and the range of activities adopted. Older pupils noted that they enjoyed history more when they are given regular opportunities to learn by doing, for example, through handling artefacts.
- Although pupils receive detailed written feedback on their work, the comments do not always include targets which incorporate precise subject-specific advice. As a result, pupils are unclear on how they can improve in history.
- Assessing pupils' progress in developing subject-specific skills is underdeveloped. Assessment procedures have been redesigned recently but have not had time to have sufficient impact on helping teachers identify which skills are developing well and which need to be worked on more. 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 study an appropriate range of topics each year which enables them to learn about important aspects of local, national and international history.
- 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.

- Effective cross-curricular links to a range of subjects, including art and geography, help pupils to develop their sense of period.
- The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of activities designed to strengthen pupils' knowledge and understanding of the past. Effective links have been developed with the library service in Sunderland and with Beamish Museum and they are used to exploit resources and expertise that would not otherwise be available.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is good.

- Self-evaluation is accurate and the school has a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in the subject. The action plan for history has appropriate objectives.
- The subject coordinator leads the subject with skill and provides good support for her colleagues. Staff have a collaborative approach and the project on Mary Anning for pupils in Years 3 and 4 provides effective evidence of a group of teachers who are not history specialists but are keen to introduce new units of work to engage and motivate the pupils.
- Although teachers' expertise is benefiting from their teaching of the Mary Anning project and links with the Sunderland North Heritage Project, professional subject-specific training for teachers in history is underdeveloped. Local networks and clusters have not yet been exploited to improve provision and outcomes by updating teachers on some of the more recent developments in the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that pupils' wider historical skills are thoroughly developed across the school
- developing marking and written feedback to ensure that pupils are given precise subject-specific advice on how they can improve their work
- embedding the new assessment procedures to ensure that pupils' progress in the development of their historical knowledge and skills is assessed consistently, and monitored and evaluated rigorously
- using local networks and clusters to help 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