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Mrs L Kavanagh
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Kavanagh

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 15 March 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 five 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 satisfactory.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is satisfactory.

- By the end of Year 6, pupils make satisfactory progress in developing their knowledge and understanding of features of life in different historical periods. Some make good progress and have knowledge in depth.
- Younger pupils could describe and explain about the life and work of Florence Nightingale. Older pupils spoke confidently about the work they had undertaken on the Tudors and the visit they had made to Saltaire as part of their study on Victorian times.
- Pupils enjoy undertaking enquiries. 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.

- Unevenness exists in the development of the full range of pupils' historical skills. 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.
- Pupils communicate their ideas in their written work with increasingly fluency as they get older. However, opportunities for pupils to develop their discursive writing skills are limited.
- The contribution of history to pupils' personal development in history is good. They are well motivated 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, 'we need to know where we came from and why our world is like it is'.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is satisfactory.

- Lessons are well organised and teachers use a range of creative approaches to motivate and engage pupils in their work. However, while much of the teaching observed was good, teaching overall is satisfactory because it is not always sharply enough focused on developing pupils' subject-specific skills in history.
- Teachers develop good relationships with pupils, celebrate pupils' achievements through colourful displays and enjoy teaching history. This helps to explain pupils' interest and engagement with their learning.
- The needs of lower-attaining pupils are considered consistently well and teaching assistants give good support. However, the needs of higher-attaining pupils across the school are not always met fully because tasks do not always challenge them sufficiently.
- Pupils' work is marked, comments are helpful and teachers give praise. However, the comments do not give sufficient subject-specific advice on how pupils can improve their work.
- Assessment procedures are being revised and the school is aware that teachers' use of assessment to promote learning in history is not yet developed sufficiently. As a result, teachers do not have a clear enough understanding of how well pupils are developing the full range of subject-specific skills.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is broad, balanced and meets requirements. An appropriate cycle is in place and pupils explore a suitable range of history topics each year. However, local history is somewhat underrepresented.

- The curriculum is being revised with a focus on themes which will incorporate discrete subjects within a cross-curricular structure. Pupils enjoy this approach to their learning and the cross-curricular links to art and design technology, for example, as well as to literacy and numeracy, help to develop their sense of period. Teachers recognise the importance of making sure that the subject retains its identity and integrity within the emerging curriculum framework.
- Pupils' sense of the past is also enhanced through a good range of visits to places of historical interest, such as Dewsbury Toy Museum and Saltaire. These visits are integrated into the schemes of work. Pupils say how much they enjoy the visits and listening to the visitors who come into school, such as the Healey Veterans and the Viking warrior. They can explain how these activities help their learning.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is satisfactory.

- Although only in role for a short space of time, the subject coordinator has demonstrated a clear commitment to the importance of history in the primary curriculum and an enthusiasm for improving the subject throughout the school. She is supported well by other teachers who work effectively as a team.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and the action plan has appropriate objectives. Senior leaders are aware that the monitoring and evaluation aspects of her role are underdeveloped and plans are in place to remedy this.
- Professional subject-specific training for teachers in history has been limited. Links with neighbouring primary and secondary schools have not yet been exploited to update teachers' knowledge and understanding of some of the more recent developments in the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- capitalising on teachers and pupils' enjoyment of history to improve further pupils' attainment and achievement in history by:
 - 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 consistently and monitored and evaluated rigorously
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to develop their discursive history writing skills, especially in Years 5 and 6
 - developing marking and written feedback to ensure that pupils are given precise subject-specific advice on how they can improve their work
 - developing teaching strategies to meet the needs of all pupils, especially the most able

- 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