

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6644
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr W C Richardson
Headteacher
Culcheth Community Primary School
Warrington Rd
Culcheth
Warrington
Cheshire
WA3 5HH

Dear Mr Richardson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science and History

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my joint visit with Mike Maddison HMI on 30 October 2006 to look at work in Science and 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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: discussions with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of seven lessons.

Science

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be good.

Achievement and Standards in science

Achievement and standards in science are good.

- Standards in science are considerably higher than average in national tests at age eleven. Pupils also reach high standards at the age of seven. The progress that pupils make between age seven and eleven is at least as good as that found across the country.
- In the five lessons seen, achievement was generally good. Pupils' books show that they cover a good deal of ground in the time available

and take a pride in their work. Their recall of the science topics they have covered ranges from satisfactory to very good.

Quality of teaching and learning in science

The quality of teaching and learning in science is good.

- Of the five lessons seen, all were at least satisfactory and four were good.
- Teachers engage well with pupils, planning interesting lessons and generally keeping lessons moving with good pace. Resources are well prepared; there is skilful use of the electronic white board and ICT presentations. The opportunity is often taken to develop pupils' literacy skills as they learn science, though this is not always as systematic as it could be. In the main, teachers have high expectations of pupils, though occasionally pupils could cope with slightly more challenge. Teachers usually sense when they have been talking for as long as is profitable, occasionally they continue too long, with diminishing returns in terms of attention and learning. Support staff often contribute well to pupils' learning.
- Marking is good, with particularly helpful advice and encouragement to pupils in Year 6. The tasks that are set for pupils to do in their books are appropriate and give sufficient scope for pupils of different abilities to do their best and thereby learn well.
- For older pupils, new work often continues from topics that were covered a year or two earlier. The new work begins with opportunity for pupils to jot down what they already know. However, this initial assessment could be more focussed on the specific points that were addressed in the earlier work. The initial assessment could be used to shape what is subsequently taught to more or less able pupils in a class.
- Pupils' work is matched to national levels and sub-levels only infrequently. Moreover, some of the annual testing and levelling is not entirely reliable. To keep better track of the headway that pupils are making, substantial pieces of work could be assessed against national criteria several times a year. Thus, patterns in the progress of individuals or whole classes could be monitored whilst there is still time to tackle any underachievement.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The curriculum for science is satisfactory.

- The link of work currently being undertaken by each year group to what is set out in the science policy document is not entirely consistent. This would leave uncertainty about what had been covered if a teacher were replaced at short notice.

- Discussion with pupils showed that recall and understanding of topics recently covered was mostly good. However, time should be built into curriculum planning to allow topics to be consolidated a little later on when assessment indicates that recall is patchy.
- Lesson plans should generally be fuller, with clearer aims, particularly with the development of areas allied to the science topic – for example, extending pupils' active vocabulary, applying data handling techniques, or using ICT. They should contain a robust indication of the level of challenge, and how long teachers are planning to talk in 'explanation' sections of the lesson. This is necessary to ensure that what actually happens in lessons is consistent with reflective planning, and to allow the subject coordinator and senior managers to audit coverage and quality.
- With shrinking numbers of pupils in reception and infant classes, the science topics could be brought into alignment to facilitate possible rationalisation to two rather than three classes.

Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management of science are generally good.

- There is reasonable coherence in what is taught across the year groups, and pupils do well. Some attention is needed to the scheduling and planning of teaching and to the use of assessment.

Inclusion in science

Inclusion in science is good.

- For most pupils, achievement is good. Support staff are often helpful in ensuring that weaker pupils get the most out of lessons. Work set usually gives the more able chance to reach ahead.

Areas for improvement in science, which we discussed, included:

- improvement of schemes of work and lesson plans
- making more of assessment.

History

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and Standards in history

Achievement and standards in history are good.

- Pupils can talk and write confidently about the topics they have been studying. Their knowledge is good and they can use historical terms accurately.
- Pupils are developing good skills in history. They are able to seek out relevant evidence and they can use this information together with prior knowledge and understanding to answer questions. They can explain changes and make accurate links between topics studied and the present day.
- Pupils' personal development in history is good. They clearly enjoy their lessons, are keen to learn and work together willingly and effectively when required.

Quality of teaching and learning in history

The quality of teaching and learning in history is good.

- Teachers plan their lessons well and exploit a variety of teaching strategies, including the effective use of interactive white boards, to engage the pupils. Resources are carefully selected.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and are keen to make the subject exciting. They use visits and outside speakers effectively to enhance the learning process.
- Teachers have high expectations. Work is appropriately differentiated and teaching assistants are deployed skilfully to support learning.
- Marking is good and the comments made on pupils' work mix praise with appropriate and helpful suggestions on to how to improve.
- The formal assessment of progress in history according to National Curriculum levels is not undertaken at present but the school recognises this as an area for development. Bearing in mind the topic approach taken to foundation subjects, it is important to collect precise pupil data on knowledge, skills and understanding in history to enhance future teaching and learning for pupils as they move through the school.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- The scheme of work for history identifies precise topics for each year group and provides appropriate guidance for teachers. Local links are effectively exploited.
- The topic approach to the study of the foundation subjects means that history is studied for only part of each year. The school is aware of the need to ensure greater coherence in the history curriculum and is currently working to identify links between the history topics studied each year so that teaching responds to and builds on prior learning.

Leadership and management of history

The quality of leadership and management of history is good.

- The co-ordinator's self evaluation of the subject is accurate and she has a clear picture of the strengths of history teaching in the school and of the areas for development.

Subject issue – literacy

The development of literacy in history is reasonably good.

- Teachers take great care to develop pupils' literacy skills as they study history. This was particularly evident in a Year 5 lesson in which the development of literacy skills in relation to writing was a specific learning objective. Such good practice, however, is not yet an explicit requirement in the scheme of work for history. The school recognises this and acknowledges the need to identify precise learning opportunities in history in each year when literacy skills can be developed.

Inclusion in history

Inclusion in history is good.

- Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported in class. Along with higher attaining pupils they are given appropriate tasks and make good progress.

Areas for improvement in history, which we discussed, included:

- developing the formal use of assessment to enhance teaching and learning
- identifying precise learning opportunities in the history curriculum when literacy skills can be developed.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop your work in science and history in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Jim Bennetts
Her Majesty's Inspector