

26 January 2007

Mrs M Walker
Headteacher
Portland Primary School
Laird Street
Claughton
Birkenhead
CH41 0AB

Dear Mrs Walker

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme - History

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during the visit I made on 08 January 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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half term.

I undertook to provide a brief written version of the main points made in my feedback at the end of the visit, to support development in history. This follows. The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Provision in history is good. Pupils achieve well, enjoy the subject and are very enthusiastic about the topics they study and the museums and historical sites they visit. Teaching and learning are good and the many links between history and other subjects are enhancing pupils' skills across the curriculum.

Achievement and standards

- Pupils make good progress overall from below average starting points but this is stronger in some aspects of history than others. They make good progress in acquiring knowledge of the historical periods they study and show increasing awareness of the chronology of events and periods. Their historical skills, such as the use of sources, are developing well but are less advanced. Standards at the end of Year 6 are broadly average.

- Pupils find history interesting and are fully engaged with the subject matter during lessons. They enjoy learning, behave well and respond positively to the many opportunities they have to work collaboratively and to help each other.
- Pupils have good background knowledge of the topics they are studying and talk enthusiastically to visitors about them, for example about Henry VIII and about life in Victorian times. Their understanding of chronology is impressive. Their skills in writing are improving as a result of the good links teachers make between history and literacy.
- History has a high profile within school and the vibrant displays and wide range of trips and visits, to Liverpool Museum for example, ensure that pupils are becoming more aware of their own culture and others' cultures.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good and there are examples of outstanding practice in Key Stage 2. Teachers are enthusiastic about history and their love of the subject is passed on to their pupils.

- Lesson preparation is good and teachers are creative in their planning. There are strong links with other subjects, for example design and technology, art and English. These links ensure that there is a wide variety of learning opportunities offered to pupils. Teachers share learning objectives clearly with their pupils and often refer to them during lessons to gauge how far they have been met.
- Classroom management is secure and teachers treat their pupils with dignity and respect. They have high expectations of what their pupils can achieve although even more could be done to provide increasingly challenging work for more able pupils.
- New technology is used well as a tool for both teaching and learning tool and the school's digital camera is popular amongst pupils. There are electronic whiteboards in many classrooms and pupils use them, for example, to place pictures of historical artefacts in the correct category when deciding upon the nature of poverty and wealth in Victorian England. Homework is set regularly and pupils enjoy using computers for their own research.
- Marking is both regular and detailed, often linked to specific targets in literacy. Pupils' progress is assessed and tracked according to National Curriculum guidelines, but there is insufficient moderation of pupils' work.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good. It is linked to developments in other subjects and planning is amended following an annual evaluation of its effectiveness.

- Learning through doing is a major aspect of the curriculum. Pupils are so interested in the topics they are studying that they produce work outside the classroom which is far in excess of what is required for homework. Models of historical artefacts, Roman armour for example, abound in classrooms and on corridors. Pupils speak highly of the opportunities they have to listen to visitors who come to school and talk to them about their childhood experiences.
- Enrichment activities are a strong feature of the curriculum and the wide variety of trips is well established. The visit to the Deva Museum in Chester reinforces pupils understanding of life in Roman times and older pupils were moved by their attendance at the Remembrance Day service in Hamilton Square.
- There are good links with pupils' literacy development.

Leadership and management of history

Leadership and management are good. Although the current history co-ordinator has been in post for a relatively short time, she has an accurate view of the effectiveness of the subject in the school and has benefited from subject-specific in-service training both within the school and as part of local authority initiatives.

- Departmental documentation is thorough and gives good support to non-specialist teachers and teaching assistants.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning in history is now well established.
- Pupils' achievement is tracked regularly across all years but the accuracy of levels of attainment is not given sufficient scrutiny.

Inclusion

Every child really does matter in the school and teachers work hard to ensure that each individual can take full advantage of what the history curriculum can offer. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported because of the strong teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants.

Literacy

History teaching and the history curriculum make a good contribution to pupils' literacy skills.

- Curriculum planning and lesson preparation are linked closely to pupils' targets in literacy and to the development of their skills in reading, speaking and writing.
- Pupils write in a range of genres, including newspaper reports, letters and diaries.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that higher attaining pupils are challenged more
- placing greater emphasis on pupils' acquisition of historical skills
- moderating pupils' assignments to ensure that levels of attainment are accurate.

Thank you once again for your kindness during my visit. I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop history in the school.

Yours sincerely

Jim Kidd
Additional Inspector