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Mr S McMullan
Headteacher
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Dear Mr McMullan

Ofsted survey inspection programme – History

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 14 June to look at work in history.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on history and literacy.

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: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of four part-lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Standards in history are average and pupils' achievement is good.

- Although standards are average, they are rising and in some classes, they are above average. Pupils' achievement is good although it is better in some classes than others.
- Pupils have good knowledge of the topics they are studying and often have a good grasp of historical detail and vocabulary. Their knowledge is generally stronger than their historical skills, but they are increasingly confident in their use of sources of historical evidence.

- Pupils' written work in history benefits from planned links with literacy.
- Pupils' personal development is good with some outstanding features, notably their attitudes and enthusiasm. They enjoy history and show determination to succeed. They collaborate well with others.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good.

- Although teaching is good overall, it is better in some classes than others. Some is outstanding and contributes to improving standards and pupils' enjoyment.
- Teachers plan a rich variety of activities. They use their on-going assessment of pupils' achievement to match work to pupils needs and adapt the scheme of work appropriately.
- The school's focus on improving writing is raising standards in history, as it is improving the quality of pupils' organisation and communication skills.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly, but most comments relate to pupils' literacy skills, and opportunities to note their achievements in history are missed.
- Limited use is made of enquiry questions to structure learning and add challenge.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- The school's enthusiasm for history has resulted in extra topics being covered than those required by the National Curriculum programme of study. Links with other subjects, especially literacy, are good and help to make the curriculum more relevant and raise standards.
- Excellent use is made of visits and visitors to enrich the curriculum and these make a significant contribution to pupils' enjoyment and their learning. There is a good emphasis on local history.
- Much curriculum planning is good, but there is no guidance on progression to ensure pupils continue to develop skills and understanding at an appropriate level throughout the school.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good.

- Responsibility is shared between the history subject leader and the subject leader with overall responsibility for humanities. This ensures good practice is shared between subjects and the profile of history in the school is high.

- The subject leaders are enthusiastic. They have a good understanding of the rationale behind the school's curriculum revisions and can identify how this is benefiting pupils' achievement in history.
- Good records are kept to monitor pupils' progress in history and some analysis is undertaken. Monitoring of provision includes evaluation of visits and scrutiny of pupils' work.
- The school has a good understanding of strengths and areas for development in teaching and learning.

Subject issue: literacy in history

As noted above, the school's revision of its curriculum to improve links between subjects is enriching provision and raising standards. In particular, the link between writing and history is well developed, so that the quality of pupils' writing in history benefits from the emphasis given to their literacy skills. This helps to reinforce their knowledge and understanding of the history they are studying.

Inclusion

Teachers use a good range of strategies to meet the needs of all pupils, including setting greater challenges for more able pupils and grouping pupils according to the task. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported by teachers and teaching assistants. In some lessons they achieve particularly well; they sustain concentration and effort to produce substantial pieces of work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- providing guidance in progression of historical skills and understanding to support teachers' planning
- using enquiry questions to structure learning
- improving marking to identify pupils' achievement in history as well as literacy.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop 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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Heather Richardson
Her Majesty's Inspector