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Mr Paul Woodward
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Dear Mr Woodward

Ofsted survey inspection programme: History

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 24 September 2007 to inspect 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, and a review of a sample of pupils' work.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

On the basis of the evidence that I saw during my visit, standards are average. Given that pupils enter school with standards that are average, this represents satisfactory progress.

- The above statement is an overall judgement. At a more detailed level, the standard of some pupils' work is above average and they make good progress. However, this group of pupils is capable of doing even better given appropriate challenge and encouragement.
- The quality of work in exercise books is very variable; for example, in the way in which sources are analysed and the way in which pupils present their answers. Some pupils do this very well; others clearly struggle when it comes to thinking about evidence and communicating

their thoughts. Progression – work becoming clearly more challenging as pupils get older – is not clearly defined.

- The work of all pupils shows them using, with varying success, a good range of skills – in particular, research using books and the computer, communication and presentation.
- The subject contributes well to pupils' personal development. Two clear examples were their comments on the treatment of children in industrial settings in the 1830s and the Nazis' treatment of the Jews in the 1930s.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- The quality of teaching and learning illustrated in the samples of pupils' work provided varies considerably. The work of some pupils shows clear evidence of the successful evaluation of evidence and its subsequent communication but this was not always evident. Evidence of matching work to pupils' needs was also unclear, in particular, ensuring challenge for the more able.
- The quality in the two lessons I saw was good. In one class with only a small number of pupils, the work was very well-matched to pupils' needs and they made good progress in their understanding and their ability to evaluate and use evidence. In the other class with a large number of pupils, the response of pupils to the task set was very enthusiastic. They collaborated well and had good discussions about judgements and evidence.
- Marking is sometimes cursory and not sufficiently linked to ensuring progress in historical knowledge and skills.
- Teachers use different methods to record pupils' progress in the subject so it is not easy to compare progress over time or to compare performance in history with the core subjects.
- Teachers put a lot of effort into visits to local historical sites and these are much appreciated by pupils. The visits are well used to support learning.
- Pupils enjoy history. All those interviewed were very enthusiastic about the subject and could talk fluently about what they have studied. Older pupils say quite openly that history is fun, although their understanding of links between the past and the present is too limited.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Currently, the curriculum follows a literal interpretation of the National Curriculum and QCA schemes of work. However, as a result pupils study a few topics in depth and are unable to form a continuous

narrative linking together the different themes studied. Pupils' overall knowledge of the background to the world around them is too cursory.

Leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory.

- The new coordinator has some very good ideas about revising the curriculum, developing links between history and other subjects, improving assessment, and ensuring that all teachers understand progression in both content and skills. The coordinator recognises the need to provide pupils with greater challenge. Some improvements are already in place. Others, however, require further work. Changes will require careful monitoring.

The subject's response to Every Child Matters

History's response to the Every Child Matters agenda is satisfactory but it could be better. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of British and European history, linked to the present, is too limited. The new coordinator understands this and is rethinking the curriculum after a careful audit of what pupils need to learn. We had good discussions about how the curriculum required by law can be delivered meaningfully as part of seeking answers to 'big questions' and establishing a better sense of chronology.

Inclusion

Inclusion is satisfactory.

- The relative performance of girls and boys appears to be broadly similar although, as has been previously indicated, the absence of a uniform assessment system makes it difficult for the coordinator to monitor the overall performance of pupils and to compare performance in different subjects.
- Though it is clear that teachers do match work to pupils' needs, the evidence I saw suggests that this needs to be done more precisely. In particular, the needs of more able pupils are not sufficiently well addressed.
- The curriculum is good but it could do more to prepare pupils for life in a multicultural Britain and Europe.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing the curriculum to make it more coherent, progressive and responsive to pupils' needs
- improving marking and assessment
- raising expectations generally and improving provision for more able pupils.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term and made available to the team for the next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Paul Armitage HMI
Ofsted Specialist Adviser for History