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Mr Clive Dunn
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Dunn

Ofsted survey inspection programme: History

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 18 October 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: the inspection of four lessons, 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 good.

Achievement and standards

Standards in history are good and, given their low starting points pupils make good progress.

- This is more favourable than your own assessment of pupils' standards in English but reflects the substantial efforts made in history by your teachers, the co-ordinator and the pupils.
- Pupils have a good knowledge of the subjects they are studying. This is linked to their enthusiasm to talk about what they have done and to their ability to reflect on its significance. Even the youngest pupils do this; for example, when talking about the longer term impact of the founding of your school.

- Pupils also have a good understanding of history skills. They can seek out evidence, evaluate it and communicate their understanding well. The links made between history and literacy, art, drama and other subjects are successful even though, to some extent, pupils' achievement in history is held back by their literacy difficulties.
- Pupils' personal development in history is good. A really striking feature is the way that pupils in history lessons behave well, work well together, listen and have patience. They are beginning to develop a sense of how human beings outside their own experience have lived in the past and are able to draw comparisons with the present.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- A main feature of the learning is the extent to which pupils find things out for themselves. They are clear that we do not always know answers and that there can be different, legitimate conclusions.
- Another principal feature is the visits made to different historical venues and the visitors who come to school to explore history. These activities have made a big impression on pupils, so helping them learn.
- Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the topics they teach are good. They are interested in the subject and seem to get as much fun from it as the pupils. The result is interesting lessons and outside activities.
- Teachers plan well and use both National Curriculum objectives and the school's new skills-based assessment system to good effect. Pupils are often divided into groups, each group undertaking work at a level most suited to its ability. This works well so that, for instance, more-able pupils are well served and so too are those with learning difficulties and disabilities.
- Teachers link history well to literacy and other subjects though as the school acknowledges, links to literacy need further development.
- When marking, teachers' comments are generally cursory, raising the issue of the sufficiency of information available to pupils to help them improve further.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum has recently been revised very thoroughly by the new coordinator looking at match to the National Curriculum and taking into account encouragement from the National Strategy.
- The claim in the school's self evaluation that there is well-planned progression in history skills is valid. Your coordinator is well aware of current debate on providing greater continuity and relevance in the history curriculum.

- As previously indicated, very good links are made between history and other subjects, notably literacy and ICT.
- Also as previously indicated, the school provides a wide range of opportunities for history visits and visitors to enrich the curriculum.

Leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management is outstanding.

- In the short time since her appointment, the history coordinator has successfully undertaken a thoughtful and well-informed review of the curriculum; a review of assessment and the use made of assessment information; and has generally given encouragement to the subject as a vehicle for teaching not only history but also literacy, ICT and other skills. All the innovations are working and have already had a significant impact on the quality of teaching and learning and the general enthusiasm for the subject.
- The coordinator monitors most aspects of history teaching very well including teachers' lesson plans and some of the outcomes although she has not yet been provided with the time to monitor other teachers' teaching.
- The coordinator is well-supported by both teachers and the senior management team. All have been highly encouraging of the innovations.

Subject issue: Every Child Matters

At the heart of the innovations introduced by the coordinator is the desire for pupils to do better. It is part of the school's general thrust for improvement put in place as a response to the last full Ofsted inspection. The emphasis on pupils thinking and doing for themselves in history as well as the development of history skills which can be used in diverse contexts are both aimed at supporting pupils as they get older. The issue (partly linked to ensuring continuity with the new Key Stage 3) of how the curriculum can be made even more relevant to pupils to help them understand the world in which they live is something which the school has already indicated will inform the next cycle of curriculum development.

Inclusion

Inclusion is good. There is no marked difference in the achievement of different groups of pupils. More-able pupils are well served although there is scope to do better. Likewise, the provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is good. Teaching assistants are very well deployed to support when necessary.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that marking tells the pupils how they can improve
- ensuring that work in history is used even more to raise standards of in literacy generally
- seek ways of improving pupils' understanding of chronology and links between what is studied in history and the present day.

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
Specialist Adviser for History