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Mr J L Roper
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Roper

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 06 March 2008 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 literacy and information and communication technology (ICT).

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 learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of seven lessons and part lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- From below average skill levels when they enter the school, pupils make good progress in history and reach broadly average standards by the time they leave at the end of Year 6.
- Pupils are aware of the range of evidence historians use to make their judgements and use source material well in class for their personal research. For example they elicit accurate information from both pictorial evidence and eyewitness accounts about schools in Edwardian times. They have good chronological skills, but some higher-order skills, how to detect bias for example, are not developed well enough.

- Pupils' standards in speaking and writing are improving, as a result of the many opportunities they have to present their work to the rest of the class and to produce historical poems and diaries.
- Pupils are generally adept at using computers and Year 6, for example, write PowerPoint presentations with confidence.
- History is a popular subject in school. This is demonstrated by the outstanding display and by the pride with which pupils speak, both of their work and of the many historical visits organised for them.

Quality of teaching and learning of history

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers have a real interest in history and lesson preparation is of such high quality that pupils often have at least three separate but linked learning experiences in each lesson. Teachers motivate their pupils with phrases such as, 'Today we are going to work as historians' and 'We are going to be archaeologists for the next hour!'
- Opportunities for pupils to reinforce their skills in both literacy and ICT are integral parts of most lessons. Teachers themselves use the electronic whiteboard as a teaching and learning tool outstandingly well.
- Teachers make sure that the work is accessible to pupils of all levels of ability and support and guidance in lessons from both teachers and teaching assistants is a strength.
- Assessment is good and, after each unit of work, pupils who need more support are highlighted. Marking is very impressive and pupils receive detailed comments on the standards they have reached.
- On occasions, teachers spend too long introducing the objectives and pupils become a little restless because they are so keen to get on with their work.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is well planned, meets statutory requirements and allows for many links with other subjects. Pupils themselves recognise that they are studying history alongside art, literacy and ICT in particular.
- Teachers produce impressive resources to interest their pupils and pupils of all ability levels can take full advantage of everything history lessons have to offer.
- The curriculum emphasises the development of pupils' basic skills in history but the evaluation of evidence and the notion of bias are not covered effectively enough.
- There is a wide range of visits and visitors to ensure that pupils have opportunities to study history outside the classroom and each activity is linked directly to the topics under consideration. Pupils speak highly of the trips to Manchester Museum the Museum of Science and Industry.

Leadership and management in history

The leadership and management of history are good.

- The history co-ordinator has secure specialist knowledge and is supported well by talented teachers who have an enthusiasm for history.
- All relevant documentation is in place and assessment practice is good and based on current guidelines.
- Pupils' books are scrutinised regularly and there are high expectations of marking. These expectations are realised and teachers give their pupils detailed advice on how well they are progressing.
- The school has an accurate view of performance in history and ongoing self-evaluation is matter of routine. Nonetheless, more formal monitoring of the quality of teaching is needed in order to make sure that good practice across the school is shared.
- Leaders recognise that curriculum planning now needs to include more information on the development of pupils' higher order skills in history.

Subject issues: literacy and ICT in history

- Literacy is an integral part of the history curriculum and of teaching and learning in the subject. Pupils have many opportunities to practise their writing skills, to elicit information from a range of sources and to present their work orally to other pupils, for example, in relation to the life of Henry VIII.
- Teachers are fully aware of how the use of ICT can lead to higher standards in history. Teachers use the electronic whiteboard very effectively both to introduce topics and to reinforce learning. Pupils use computers at every opportunity to research new topics and to present their work in different forms.

Inclusion

- Lesson preparation provides for activities to meet the needs of pupils of all abilities. As a result, and also because of the comprehensive support provided by teaching assistants, pupils with special educational needs for example, make the same progress as their classmates. All pupils therefore benefit equally from the history curriculum.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- the importance of developing pupils' higher order skills in history
- the need for more formal monitoring of teaching and learning in order that good practice may be shared across the school.

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

Jim Kidd
Additional Inspector