

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk



17 April 2008

Ms Bridgewater  
Headteacher  
Birchensale Middle School  
Bridley Moor Road  
Redditch  
Worcestershire  
B97 6HT

Dear Ms Bridgewater

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on Tuesday 04 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 provision for gifted and talented history pupils.

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 three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Standards are good and are in line with English, whose results at the end of Key Stage 2 were just above the national average.
- This represents good achievement, given the lower than average ability of pupils on entry to the school.
- Pupils have a good understanding of the key factual content of the history topics they study, particularly the Romans and Greeks. They develop a good understanding of how things change over time and how some changes are more dramatic than others.
- Pupils are less sure about how historians differ in their interpretations of events and how to judge the significance of changes.

- Able pupils are given good encouragement to develop their abilities and interests in history but they require further support to attain high quality work.
- Pupils enjoy their lessons and like being engaged in debates and discussions.
- During each topic of study, pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) in history lessons in a variety of ways to enhance their understanding. They say they like best opportunities to undertake web searches and showing their ideas on the whiteboards.
- Self and peer assessment feature in lessons but these could be better tied to target setting than at present.

### Quality of teaching and learning of history

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Key learning objectives are displayed in lessons and teachers make sure that at the end of each lesson pupils review what they have learned.
- Interactive whiteboards are used well with stimulating questions, pictures of artefacts and clear photographs. Pupils also use the whiteboards to show their ideas and answers.
- Information about topics is presented in interesting ways and lessons proceed at a quick pace. Occasionally teachers miss opportunities to challenge able pupils to produce work of really high quality.
- Pupils are taught learning skills in lessons and there is a good focus on developing literacy skills. This particularly helps those pupils who arrive mid-term from other countries and whose understanding of English is poor.
- Key assessments are well planned and marked. There are good procedures for moderating marking across the school. Assessments using level descriptions are not regular enough for pupils to fully understand how they can move towards higher levels.
- More opportunities should be provided for pupils to deepen their understanding of interpretations and significance in history.
- There is good support for those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

### Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- The curriculum covers the National Curriculum programmes of study well and is the product of good liaison with local schools to ensure there is no overlapping of topics when pupils move to the high school.
- There are good links to work undertaken in other areas of the curriculum so that pupils use ideas and techniques from other subjects to enliven history tasks and activities.
- There are increasing opportunities for pupils identified as gifted in history to extend their knowledge and interests but more thought is needed to ensure work in class is challenging enough for this group.

- Visits to venues such as Brockhampton Hall and Coventry Cathedral bring the subject alive for pupils. In addition, the visit of a 'time traveller' from the English Civil War period helps pupils to understand how people of the time dressed, fought, and spoke.

### Leadership and management of history

The leadership and management of history are good.

- The head of department uses his experience and knowledge unstintingly to ensure teachers across the school are given the support they need to teach history well.
- Training for the subject leader on the new history curriculum and providing for the more able pupils in history is leading to clear plans for raising standards still further.
- The departmental self-evaluation is an accurate outline of the current strengths of the subject in the school and what needs to be done to bring about further improvement.
- Teachers manage their lessons well and support staff are kept fully in the picture about lesson objectives and learning tasks for their target group of pupils.

### Subject issue: provision for the gifted history pupils

- More opportunities are being provided for gifted pupils in history to develop their interests and abilities. These include extra-curricular activities which effectively build on what has been happening in school and pupils say they enjoy them and find them stimulating.
- Lesson plans identify gifted history pupils and indicate clearly what is expected of them in lessons.
- Materials are being planned which will challenge gifted pupils even further but all teachers need to be involved in the thinking behind these so that they can use them well in lessons.
- Assessment practice in history needs to focus more on moving pupils to the highest levels of work and more regular guidance needs to be given to pupils about how they can do this.

### Inclusion

- Standards of all groups of pupils are improving because the school's interventions to support better literacy are having a positive impact on results in English, and also history.
- Lessons take into account the needs of different groups of pupils and the pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress, supported well by teaching assistants.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- exploring further how to increase challenges for more able pupils in history
- sharing more regularly with pupils how well they are doing in relation to level descriptions in history and showing them more clearly how to move to higher levels
- strengthen teachers' understanding of interpretations and significance in history so that pupils have more opportunities to deepen their grasp of these concepts.

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

Peter Limm  
Her Majesty's Inspector