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Mr Smith
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Smith

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 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 literacy and also the use of 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 students' work and observation of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Although pupils enter the school with below average levels of attainment, their achievement in history is satisfactory. However, standards are below average at the end of Year 6.
- Pupils have a secure knowledge of the factual content of the topics they are studying but their historical skills in relation to chronology and the use of evidence are underdeveloped.
- Pupils are making good progress in developing their skills in ICT and pupils in Year 3 in particular access historical websites with confidence when pursuing individual and paired research.

- Pupils' personal development is good. They enjoy history, behave well in lessons and look forward to the good range of historical visits open to them.

Quality of teaching and learning in history

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Lesson preparation is of a high standard and teachers work hard to interest and motivate their pupils.
- Teachers have a detailed understanding of the importance of ICT as a learning tool and they use the electronic whiteboard very effectively indeed. Pupils benefit from the use of a good variety of relevant websites.
- Teachers know their pupils well and in-class support for pupils of all levels of ability is a strength.
- On occasions, learning is directed too much by teachers and pupils do not have enough time to complete work on their own.
- In lessons, teachers do not place enough emphasis on developing their pupils' skills in literacy. There is little extended writing in pupils' books.
- Lessons are too often purely content-based. Teaching does not develop pupils' historical skills well enough.
- Pupils do not receive enough advice on how they can improve their written work.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum meets statutory requirements overall and teachers produce resources of high quality to complement textbooks and artefacts.
- There is a good range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities to support learning in the classroom.
- Curriculum planning over-emphasises subject content at the expense of the development of pupils' historical skills. In addition, pupils' skills in literacy are not reinforced enough in lessons.
- Opportunities for cross-curricular work with other subjects are planned for but many opportunities are missed to bring these to reality.

Leadership and management of history

The leadership and management of history are satisfactory.

- Although relatively new in post, the subject co-ordinator demonstrates real enthusiasm for history and has already put an action plan for improvement in place.
- Self-evaluation of performance in the subject is generally accurate but does not place enough emphasis on how pupils' historical and literacy skills can be developed effectively.
- Leaders ensure that history has a high profile in school and the displays around school are of high quality.

- Assessment is an area of concern and marking does not give enough advice on how pupils can improve their work.
- Teachers have few opportunities for professional development.
- The monitoring of teaching and of pupils' work is currently completed informally.

Subject issues: literacy and ICT in history

- Curriculum planning is not focused enough on the development of pupils' skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening. There are few examples in pupils' books of extended writing.
- The development of pupils' skills in ICT is good and they have many opportunities to research on the Internet and to produce assignments using computers.

Inclusion

- Pupils of all ability levels enjoy history, are receptive to it and are generally fully engaged in lessons. There is good support for pupils who find the work difficult.
- There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities for all pupils.
- Although pupils achieve satisfactorily, the lack of emphasis on skills development does not lead to adequate challenge on occasions, particularly for more able pupils.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- the need for more systematic planning for the development of pupils' historical skills
- more emphasis on how the curriculum and teaching can foster pupils' skills in literacy
- better assessment practice, including better feedback, to ensure that pupils are given more advice on how they can improve their work
- more formal monitoring of teaching and of pupils' progress.

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