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Mr M Hanks
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hanks

Ofsted survey inspection programme- History

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 13 March 2008 to inspect work in history.

As well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on school visits to places of historical interest.

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: visits to one class, interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, and a review of a sample of pupils' work.

The overall quality of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Overall standards in history are average but the standards attained by some pupils are higher than this. Given pupils' below average starting points their progress is good.

- Standards in some of the work I saw were above average including some very high quality written and art work related to history in Year 6. There are good examples of high quality work on display throughout the school; for example, in Year 2 on the Middle Ages; Year 4's work on ancient Egypt; and Year 5's work on the interpretation of sources relating to Ancient Greece.

- The use of topic books to keep pupils' work together usefully allows pupils (and teachers) to see and understand how well they are progressing. Pupils' work is very well presented, with many instances of extended writing, illustration, and the use of information and communication technology (ICT).
- Pupils' personal development, encouraged by what they learn in history, is very good. Their sense of understanding of a range of social and moral issues is very clear; for example, in the impressive project undertaken by Year 6 pupils on Britain since the 1940s. Cultural development is also good, a good example being pupils' positive responses to the school's Black History Week.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- One reason for the good quality of learning is pupils' positive attitude towards the subject. They are good listeners, keen to take an active part in lessons, keen to research in books and on the internet, and are interested in presenting their work well, in books and in displays. The high quality of some of the drawing and other art work is only one example of the high quality of their presentation skills.
- Teachers are enthusiastic about teaching history and their knowledge about the topics they teach is sound. The way they use history as a vehicle for teaching literacy is impressive. One teacher commented that it gives pupils a reason for writing and developing other literacy skills.
- A key feature of the teaching is that it is reflective. Teachers are willing to try new approaches and they evaluate well after. This is most obvious in relation to their assessment of pupils' progress and the beginnings of a move towards pupils becoming more responsible for their learning often referred to as 'independent learning'.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- Its main features are that it is developing and that teachers are prepared to be cautiously innovative. This has been difficult for them. They are not trained historians and have been uncertain as to how far they could go in departing from established interpretations of the National Curriculum. However, teachers report that they have increasingly considered the curriculum too fragmented and not sufficiently relevant to pupils' needs. The headteacher commented that 'it was not doing the job'. As indicated earlier, they are also keen to develop the links between history and other subjects, notably literacy. The most obvious (and successful) outcome of the new emphasis has been Year 2's work on the Middle Ages.

Leadership and management

The quality of management is good.

- The humanities coordinator is well supported by all staff and has developed a real collegiate approach to thinking about the subject in the school and its further development. She is very clear on standards and the progress made by pupils as well as issues relating to both teaching and learning.
- The subject well supported by you and see its value as a vehicle not only for history but developing more general awareness and understanding.
- The school's plans for the future development of history as part of a general review of all foundation subjects are good.

Subject issue: History Visits

There is very good use of museums, heritage sites and other outside facilities; for example to the Maritime Museum, the British Museum and the RAF Museum. All visits complement well the history that pupils are studying at school. In each case, the visit creates considerable work both before and after the visit. The school reports considerable satisfaction with the programmes arranged by the different venues which are said to be well-tuned to the areas of interest specified beforehand by the school. The results of the visits also complement work in other subjects, notably literacy and art.

Inclusion

Inclusion in history is good. All pupils are helped to take part in history at a level appropriate to their ability. The range of activities on offer means that there is always something that pupils can enjoy. Pupils from all backgrounds work very well together and there was no evidence of pupils from one ethnic group doing better than another. Although pupils' cultural development is good, there is still scope for them to be better informed about the histories of the different peoples of this country.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included the need to ensure that:

- pupils continue to be encouraged to become more independent learners in history
- the history curriculum is developed to ensure that it becomes even more relevant to 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
Additional Inspector