

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



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Mr A Forsyth
Headteacher
West Cliff Primary School
Church Square
Whitby
North Yorkshire
YO21 3EG

Dear Mr Forsyth

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 21 May 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 information and communication technology (ICT) in history and 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, a scrutiny of relevant documentation, an analysis of pupils' work and the observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good and standards are above average.

- Pupils can talk and write confidently about the topics they have been studying. Their knowledge is good and they can use historical terms accurately. Pupils in Year 4, for example, could describe the process of mummification in great detail, whilst those in Year 6 were knowledgeable about life in Ancient Greece.
- Pupils are developing good skills in history. They are able to seek out relevant evidence and they can use this information together with prior knowledge and understanding to produce appropriate written work. Pupils' understanding of historical chronology is well supported but

their understanding of interpretation is less well developed, as is their ability to make links between topics and themes studied.

- Pupils' personal development in history is good. They thoroughly enjoy their lessons, are well motivated and keen to do well. They are developing good independent working skills. They cooperate effectively in groups when required and their behaviour is good.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers are knowledgeable, enthusiastic and reflective about their work.
- Teachers plan their lessons well. Learning objectives are shared with the pupils who enjoy the range of activities in which they are involved. Opportunities for pupils to discuss what they are discovering are readily taken and teachers' effective questioning helps the pupils to understand the topics they study. Resources are carefully selected and a variety of teaching strategies, including the effective use of ICT, helps to engage the pupils in their work.
- Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported. The skilful deployment of teaching assistants and the adaptation of tasks to match needs and abilities help these pupils to make good progress. However, the needs of the most able are not fully met. Although these pupils are given different tasks, they are not given clear expectations within the tasks as to what they should be achieving.
- Pupils' work is regularly marked, comments are helpful and teachers give much praise. However, the comments made do not always indicate to pupils how to improve their work in the subject.
- The formal assessment of progress in history according to National Curriculum levels is not undertaken at present but plans are being drawn up to address this issue.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets requirements. The scheme of work identifies precise topics for each year group and local links are effectively exploited. Although teachers' plans vary in format, planning overall is thorough.
- Cross curricular links are well developed and history is used by many teachers as the central feature of their planning for other subjects. This helps to explain why history is popular and successful. There are particularly strong links with literacy.
- The pupils benefit from a series of visits and visitors, not least because these events are well organised and are fully integrated into their learning. The pupils enthused about the visits, especially the Egyptian Day in Harrogate.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of history are good.

- The subject leader is enthusiastic, well motivated and well organised. She is keen to see provision for history develop throughout the school. She is well supported by the senior leadership team and by a teaching staff which appreciates her work.
- The work of the subject leader in monitoring teachers' planning and checking on work in pupils' books is well established. However, her monitoring of teaching and learning is underdeveloped. As a result, the spreading of good practice is 'ad hoc' and not all teachers benefit from the good practice which exists within the school.
- Self evaluation is accurate and the subject leader is developing a clear picture of the strengths of history teaching in the school and the areas that need further development.

Subject issue: information and communication technology (ICT)

The use of ICT in history is good.

- Teachers use ICT, including interactive white boards, routinely and effectively and this helps to strengthen the pupils' learning.
- The pupils are confident users of ICT equipment and their work is well structured and guided. Opportunities are regularly taken for pupils to use ICT in lessons, for example, for research, for the creation of their own PowerPoint presentations and for producing assignments.

Subject issue: provision for gifted and talented history students

The provision for gifted history students is satisfactory.

- Long term plans identify the importance of taking opportunities to meet the needs of all pupils, including gifted pupils. However, the needs of the most able history pupils are not yet fully met because teachers do not indicate clearly what is expected of such pupils. As a result, opportunities to challenge these pupils to attain even higher standards are missed.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing assessment practice, particularly feedback to ensure that pupils are given precise advice on how they can improve their work
- ensuring that the needs of gifted history pupils are met effectively
- developing the role of the subject coordinator so that she is able to gain a clearer view of teaching and learning.

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

Michael Maddison
Her Majesty's Inspector
Ofsted's Specialist Adviser for History