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Mrs V Shaw
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Dear Mrs Shaw

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 04 July 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 the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in history and the provision for gifted 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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of one lesson.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Standards in history are above average and pupils make good progress.

- Pupils interviewed speak fluently about the topics they have studied and pupils' exercise books are lively and colourful indicating their ability to use a good range of skills. Particularly good is the way they are asked to think about evidence and reach their own conclusions.
- Links with other subjects are clear and developing. The standards achieved in Year 2's art work on the Great Fire of London are impressive.
- Despite this positive picture, one weakness noted in the sample of exercise books inspected was the limited presence of extended writing.

- Pupils' personal development in history is very good. Those interviewed expressed the view that the history they are studying is helping them to understand people as well as why and how things happen. Year 6 were seen doing this effectively by trying to sort out human dilemmas; in this case, the positive and negative effects of evacuation in the Second World War.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the topics studied is good, as is their understanding of how best to teach them.
- They make lessons and other activities interesting and fun and give pupils plenty of opportunity to take an active part and find things out for themselves. However, the school is right to explore ways of giving pupils more responsibility for their own learning.
- It is clear from both the lesson seen and other examples of pupils' work that behind the teaching and learning is good planning. There are clear objectives, well-conceived lesson plans and imaginative resources.
- All groups of pupils learn well including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- There is a very thorough assessment system which informs teachers and helps them adjust their teaching to meet pupils' needs more precisely. However, it is not yet used to provide an overall judgement on pupils' progress in history in the same way that this is done for English and mathematics. Nor is it used to provide pupils with a clear enough view on their current standard in history and targets for improvement.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- It follows faithfully the requirements of the National Curriculum.
- There are very good links between history and other subjects. Besides art, there is good use of ICT and drama.
- The topics taught are richly supported not only by good use of resources in school but also by a good number of visits to historical venues, as well as visitors who organise a range of activities. These have a significant impact on pupils' understanding; for example, the opportunity to take part in a re-enactment of Egyptian burial practices or the visit to Beaulieu to explore Victorian stately homes.
- Building on its success in developing links between subjects, the school has appropriate plans (and some provision already in place) to develop the history curriculum further to improve pupils' chronological understanding and to help their understanding of the modern world.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of history are good.

- The subject leader has a good understanding of the quality of the subject in school, although she is hampered by not having enough time to see colleagues teach.
- The planning undertaken by the leader sets clear parameters and thus is very helpful to all teachers.
- She supports teachers well and promotes good discussion and development of the subject.
- She is very well supported by the headteacher who is keen to maintain pupils' and teachers' interest and momentum in the subject.

Subject issue: The use of ICT in history

- ICT is very well used in history. There is frequent use in history by pupils of word processing, PowerPoint for the presentation of pupils' historical findings, research on the internet; and the use of video cameras for recording evidence. Specific examples illustrating the relationship between history and ICT are Year 5's use of a Victorian database on famous people; spreadsheets in Year 6 linked to the study of Greek gods; and a multimedia history quiz in Year 6 using specialist word processing software and hyperlinks.

Subject issue: Provision for gifted history pupils

- There is currently no pupil identified as being gifted in history. There is a register of gifted and talented pupils but this is populated by pupils from English, mathematics, ICT, physical education, art and music.
- Teaching and learning in history classes takes account of the different needs and abilities of pupils but this alone would not add up to a formal programme for gifted historians if any are identified.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increase the opportunities for pupils to take more responsibility for their own learning
- improve the use of assessment data
- improve the coherence of the curriculum.

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

Paul Armitage
Additional Inspector