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Mrs J Turner
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Dear Mrs Turner

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 19 June 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 two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good and standards are above average.

- Pupils of all ages make good progress and some make outstanding progress in developing their historical knowledge and understanding.
- Pupils write and talk confidently about their work and can use historical terms accurately. Their knowledge is good; for example, those in Years 1 and 2 could talk at length about the Great Fire of London and the importance of Samuel Pepys, while those in Years 3 and 4 had a good appreciation of the impact of rationing on people in Britain in the Second World War.

- Pupils can seek out relevant evidence, ask perceptive questions and use the information they have discovered to produce well articulated explanations. However, pupils' specific historical skills, such as understanding chronology and evaluating sources, are not so well developed.
- Pupils' personal development is outstanding. They are eager to learn and thoroughly enjoy their lessons. They are keen to be involved in discussions. They take a pride in their work and their behaviour is first rate.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Lessons are well planned and teachers skilfully engage pupils in their work. Good questioning by teachers, and particularly the use of supplementary questions, reinforces the learning and helps the pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding.
- Teachers are enthusiastic towards the subject and this is reflected in the pupils' interest in their work. Relationships between pupils and teachers are strong and pupils work well together. Different tasks are set to meet the needs of the pupils but expectations and aspirations for the most able are not always explicit enough.
- Pupils' work is regularly marked. Teachers give much praise and helpful guidance is provided. However, written comments do not always indicate how pupils could improve their work in history.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets requirements. The school follows a rolling two-year programme. It recognises that it would be appropriate to review the history units covered to ensure that the most suitable topics are taught within each year group and that each topic is taught for an adequate amount of time.
- Cross-curricular links are strong and do much to strengthen pupils' learning. Literacy is particularly well developed and opportunities to improve speaking and listening skills are regularly taken in history lessons. There are close links with other subjects, including geography, art, and design and technology.
- Pupils enjoy visits and learning outside the classroom makes a considerable contribution to pupils' learning in history. Trips to Temple Newsam House and Eden Camp, for example, are interlinked with work in the classroom and the pupils can explain in depth how these visits help their learning when they are back in school.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of history are good.

- The subject coordinator is conscientious and dedicated and she is determined to see provision for history developed throughout the school. She is well supported in this by yourself and by the teaching staff.
- The subject is well organised, planning is thorough and the limited resources are used wisely. The coordinator has an accurate view of the strengths of the subject and of the areas for development.
- The work of the coordinator in monitoring planning is well established. However, the school acknowledges that the role of the coordinator is underdeveloped in relation to the checking of pupils' work and teachers' assessments, and in the monitoring of teaching and learning. As a result, the sharing of good practice, for example, is 'ad hoc' and not all teachers benefit systematically from the good practice which exists within the school.

Subject issue: ICT

The use of ICT in history is good.

- Facilities are limited but teachers take the opportunity not only to use ICT in their teaching whenever it is appropriate but also to plan tasks which allow pupils to use ICT in their work. Undertaking research on the internet strengthens pupils' enquiry skills, and the creation of PowerPoint presentations and the word processing of assignments help them develop valuable skills.

Subject issue: provision for gifted and talented history students

The provision for gifted history students is satisfactory.

- Teachers plan for different ability groups but the needs of the most able pupils are not being fully met in history because expectations and aspirations for these individuals are not always made explicit by teachers in the tasks they set.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing pupils' historical skills
- developing written feedback to ensure that pupils are given precise advice on how they can improve their work in history
- improving provision for gifted history 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 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