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Mrs S Gardner
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Dear Mrs Gardner

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 15 September 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 upon information and communication technology (ICT) and provision for the gifted and talented in history.

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 you, the chair of governors and the subject leader, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and the observation of one lesson.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good and standards are above average.

- Pupils of all abilities make good progress and achieve high standards. This is also confirmed by the school's internal tracking data for history. Younger pupils, for instance, can compare well how life in the 1950s was different to life today, while older pupils know how the village of Sywell has changed since the 1840s.
- Pupils can use primary and secondary sources well, and their chronological understanding is enhanced through the use of appropriate timelines and the study of historical changes over longer periods of time.

- Pupils can competently use a good range of historical sources. They ask appropriate questions about relevant artefacts and can interrogate the census data from 1851.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are excellent. Some are very interested in the subject and visit museums and other places of historical interest in their own time. They talk knowledgeably about such visits. Pupils can sustain their concentration and they discuss their work with each other, and with adults, in a mature manner.

Quality of teaching and learning of history

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Pupils make good progress in lessons because a wide range of activities is planned for them. Teachers know how to meet the needs of the lower and higher attainers well. Lesson planning is detailed and linked well to medium-term planning.
- Learning support assistants are efficiently used. They work intensively with relevant pupils and enable them to make good progress. Pupils with learning difficulties and those identified as highly able have appropriate targets.
- The pace to the learning is brisk. In the lesson observed, time was effectively used and the teacher's perceptive questioning extended the understanding of the pupils. Whole-class teaching points were made at regular intervals.
- The pupils' work is regularly marked and some helpful comments are made. However, the marking does not routinely identify targets that the pupils should be aiming towards.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is generally satisfactory.

- The curriculum in Key Stage 1 is broad. However at Key Stage 2, there is some imbalance. Too much time, for instance, is allocated to local history with the result that the study units on invaders and settlers and on Ancient Greece are not taught to the required depth.
- A new history policy has been recently adopted by the governing body and it is the intention that there will be a greater emphasis on encouraging pupils' creativity through the development of stronger cross-curricular links.
- Pupils' learning experiences are currently broadened through the organisation of special days, for instance on the Romans and Tudors. On such occasions, external visitors are invited. Visits to museums and other places of historical interest are limited but there are plans to increase these.
- All the pupils interviewed stated how much they enjoyed learning history. As one stated, 'learning is fun'.

Leadership and management of history

The leadership and management of history are generally satisfactory.

- The subject leader works for two days per week and also has responsibility for two other subjects. This necessarily limits what can be done.
- The subject leader has a generally good understanding of strengths and weaknesses in the subject and an appropriate action plan for 2008-2009 has been formulated.
- However, the subject leader has not yet been able to formally observe and evaluate history teaching and learning across the school. Plans are underway for this to happen in the near future.

Subject issue: ICT

The use of ICT is good.

- All classes have interactive whiteboards and teachers are competent users of these.
- Pupils regularly use ICT in their lessons. Some have well-developed skills which enable them to research relevant material on the Internet or to prepare PowerPoint presentations.
- The school is in the process of upgrading its ICT hardware. It has recently purchased 15 laptops to be used for whole-class teaching. Pupils say how much they value using these. Pupils are competent users of ICT and some download information by using the Internet at home.

Subject issue: gifted and talented pupils in history

- The school has a policy on the highly able child and a register for those identified as gifted and talented. However, no pupils are currently identified as gifted in history.

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

- ensure that the curriculum is better balanced and that it fulfils all requirements
- ensure that the subject leader checks provision in the subject much more regularly so that further improvements can then be suggested
- ensure that the marking of work identifies short-term targets for the pupils and that their progress towards these is then routinely evaluated.

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

Champak Chauhan
Her Majesty's Inspector