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Mrs A Pickup
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Pickup

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 18 November 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 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 outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is outstanding and standards are well above average.

- Pupils make outstanding progress in developing their knowledge and understanding. They enjoy history and can talk accurately about the topics they are studying.
- Pupils in Years 2 and 3, for example, can describe and explain life in Aztec times. Those in Year 4 have an excellent knowledge of Ancient Greece, and pupils in Year 6 speak confidently and enthusiastically about their work on the First World War.
- Pupils use historical terms accurately and have an excellent understanding of the craft of the historian. They understand how to

present arguments in history and why it is important to look at other people's points of view.

- Pupils have outstanding skills of enquiry. They examine a wide range of evidence, including original sources and artefacts. They ask pertinent questions, seek out possible answers and are aware that they must substantiate their ideas with evidence. Through the enquiry-based approach to history, they are effectively taking greater responsibility for their own learning. Other historical skills, such as chronological understanding and interpretations, are also being well developed.
- History makes an outstanding contribution to pupils' personal development. Pupils are well motivated and engaged in their learning. They work well together or on their own, behave impeccably and take a pride in their work.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge, have high expectations and teach the subject with enthusiasm. They regard history as an essential subject in preparing the pupils for the future.
- Lessons are well planned. They have clear objectives and learning is reviewed towards the end of each lesson. Getting the pupils to think, to come up with their own ideas that are supported by historical evidence and to explain these to the rest of the class is a strong feature of lessons.
- Learning is well matched to pupils' needs. The more able pupils, including those who are gifted in history, have the opportunity through the enquiry-based approach to develop their knowledge and understanding at the pace which suits them best.
- Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported in their work. Teaching assistants help identified pupils to be fully involved in their learning.
- Pupils' work is marked carefully and praise is given. Comments are helpful and guide pupils clearly on how to make progress in their work.
- Pupils are encouraged to evaluate their own work and to consider what they have learned and how well they are doing. They like this approach and say it helps them to understand what they have to do to improve.
- Assessment practice has been revised and National Curriculum levels are now more integral to the assessment process for all pupils. Although these new arrangements are at an early stage, this system is helping teachers to assess progress more accurately and to plan their lessons more effectively.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is outstanding.

- The curriculum is broad, balanced and meets requirements. Local history is well represented.

- The curriculum is designed to capture the pupils' imaginations and use their creativity and enthusiasm to strengthen their learning. With appropriate teacher guidance, pupils begin each topic by deciding what key questions they would like to answer. This helps to draw the pupils into their work and to make it relevant for them. A variety of activities, including role plays, feast days and interviewing experts, such as the local resident who spoke about his childhood before the Second World War, maintains their focus. It also helps to develop their skills, as well as improving their knowledge and understanding.
- Cross-curricular links are strong and reinforces pupils' learning. Literacy is well developed in history in all year groups. Opportunities are also taken to link with other subjects, for example with geography when studying the history of the school, with art when studying the Aztecs, and with mathematics when looking at counting systems used by the Incas.
- The curriculum is enriched by a range of visits to places of historical interest and by the use of visitors. Learning outside the classroom is organised for each year group. Pupils remember well what they discover on the visits, say how much they enjoy these activities, and explain how they make their learning more interesting.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of history are outstanding.

- The coordinator is passionate about her role, well organised and works unflinchingly to support her colleagues. She is aware of the importance of history in the pupils' education and is keen to see the subject develop for all pupils. The enquiry-based approach which underpins history teaching in the school is the result of a well-researched project undertaken by the coordinator.
- Planning is thorough and action plans have appropriate priorities. Record keeping is detailed.
- Self evaluation is accurate and the school is developing a clear picture of the strengths of the subject and the areas that need further development. The coordinator is keen to improve provision and outcomes for pupils in history. Although the work on developing assessment practice is at an early stage, it is well focussed.
- The coordinator welcomes the meetings with a link governor as they provide an opportunity for her to focus the school on the needs of the subject and to celebrate its successes.

Subject issue: ICT

The use of ICT in history is outstanding.

- Teachers use digital projectors and interactive whiteboards successfully to engage pupils and to reinforce learning. Pupils enjoy their use as they help to bring their learning to life.
- Pupils regularly use computers for research work and to word process their own work. Older pupils interrogate websites confidently and are aware that some websites are not completely reliable.

- The school is developing an electronic archive and teachers are using the sources already available to support their work, for example with Year 3 on the history of the school.

Subject issue: provision for gifted and talented history pupils

The provision for gifted history pupils is outstanding.

- A small number of pupils are identified on a register as gifted in history and are known to teachers who make appropriate provision for them through precise tasks, such as research-based activities. The quality of the work they produce is outstanding.
- All pupils are encouraged to undertake additional work at home and gifted pupils relish this opportunity because they are highly motivated in the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing assessment practice so that it provides effective guidance to both pupils and teachers.

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