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07 October 2008

Mr J Repton
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Dear Mr Repton

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 29 September 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 two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

By the end of Key Stage 2, standards are average. Given that pupils enter school with standards that are below average, this represents good achievement.

- Pupils are developing good knowledge and understanding in history. They have good attitudes and can talk animatedly and informatively about their work.
- Pupils in Key Stage 1, for example, can describe and explain some of the differences between seaside holidays in Victorian times and today. Pupils in Key Stage 2 have a good knowledge of invaders and settlers and a good understanding of developments in Victorian times.

- Pupils can point to sources they use to find out about the past and older ones appreciate that historians cannot just make it up! They are also aware of why it is important to know about the past; as one pupil said, 'It helps us to know about today'.
- Pupils enjoy history; they describe it as 'fun'. They particularly enjoy undertaking research and their enquiry skills are being well developed through activities which strengthen their learning. Pupils are developing a good understanding of chronology and the use of evidence, including artefacts, but their wider historical skills, especially interpretation, are underdeveloped.
- Pupils make good progress largely because they are taught history in blocks of time, usually for a period of up to three weeks. They enjoy this approach because, as the older ones pointed out, they have more time to study the topic and do not have to break off to study another subject.
- Pupils' personal development is good. They are involved in their lessons, eager to learn and keen to answer questions. Relationships are good and they are well behaved.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers are enthusiastic about the subject and enjoy teaching it. They plan well and use a variety of activities which maintain pupils' interest and help them make good progress. Lessons have clear objectives and learning is reviewed towards the end.
- The needs of those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are regularly considered. They are well supported so that they can be fully involved in their learning. Through the subject working groups teaching assistants are involved in planning, and in the classroom they enable the pupils they are working with to make as much progress as others. The needs of higher attaining pupils are also carefully considered.
- Pupils' work is marked, comments are helpful and teachers give praise. However, the comments are rarely subject specific and do not indicate how pupils can improve their work in history.
- Pupils' progress is assessed and recorded. However, the school does not undertake the formal assessment of progress in history according to National Curriculum levels.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced, and meets requirements. Although the pupils know about the importance of the railways in the history of Stockton, local history is underrepresented.
- Cross-curricular links are strong and strengthen pupils' learning. Literacy is well developed in history in all year groups. Opportunities are also taken to link with other subjects, for example, with art when

studying 'Remembrance' and with drama when looking at invaders and settlers.

- Learning outside the classroom is outstanding. The curriculum is enriched for all pupils by an extensive range of visits to places of historical interest and by the use of visitors. These activities are organised for each history topic. 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.
- These visits are integrated into the schemes of work, strengthening learning and helping the pupils make good progress. Pupils are well prepared before the visit, and follow-up activities in the classroom reinforce their learning. This was particularly noticeable in the Year 6 lessons in which the pupils were working on tasks based on their recent visit to Beamish Museum.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of history are good.

- The coordinator is enthusiastic about her role, well organised and works hard to support staff. She is keen to see the subject develop and aware of the importance of history retaining its integrity within the cross-curricular teaching framework throughout the school.
- Planning is thorough and action plans have appropriate priorities. Record keeping is detailed and the digital photographs of historical activities help to provide the school with an accurate and fascinating record of pupils' learning.
- 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 school is aware that assessment is underdeveloped.
- The work of the coordinator in monitoring lessons and the checking of work in pupils' books helps to provide the school with a good overview of teaching and learning in history.
- The annual oral report to governors provides an opportunity for the coordinator to focus the school on the needs of the subject. It is also a useful reminder to governors and senior leaders of the importance of individual subjects within the cross-curricular approach to teaching and learning.

Subject issue: ICT

The use of ICT in history is good.

- Pupils often use computers in lessons and regularly have the opportunity to produce work on them. For example, Year 6 pupils' production of a magazine page using the program 'Comic Life' not only enhanced their ICT skills but also strengthened their knowledge and understanding of what they learned at Beamish Museum.
- Older pupils can confidently interrogate relevant websites and are aware that some websites are not completely reliable.

- Teachers and pupils use the interactive whiteboards regularly. Pupils particularly enjoy it when they are used because, as they said, 'It helps you learn better'.

Subject issue: provision for gifted and talented history students

- At present one pupil is identified as being gifted in history. However, the school is aware of those pupils who show particular strengths in the subject and good provision is made for them in lessons, for example through research and computer based activities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing pupils' wider historical skills, especially interpretation
- improving assessment practice and feedback to ensure that all pupils know clearly how they can improve their work.

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