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Mr M Matthews  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Matthews

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 08 December 2008 to look at work in history.

As outlined in our initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subjects, the visit had a particular focus on information and communication technology (ICT) in history and 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, a scrutiny of relevant data and documentation, an analysis of pupils' work and the observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good and standards are average overall.

- Although there is a wide range of ability in history classes, all pupils make good progress including those with learning difficulties and those for whom English is their second language.
- Pupils acquire a good range of historical skills. For example, in a Year 6 class, pupils interpreted successfully a range of resources linked to Britain since the 1960s even though it took one group a little time to identify Routemaster busses and another, Mrs Thatcher. Others in the class were involved in filming the outcomes of their research which they would later edit using sophisticated software.

- In another example, a Year 3 class identified and evaluated a gramophone, tape recorder and other more modern sound production equipment, responded to appropriate questions and located the different items correctly on a time line.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is judged to be good.

- Lessons are very well planned with clear, challenging objectives. They have good pace and, because the teachers know pupils' strengths and weaknesses well, work is well matched to the needs of different groups of pupils. Teachers make learning interesting and fun.
- Management of pupils is excellent resulting in good behaviour.
- Outstanding use is made of historical resources especially ICT. Marking of pupils' work is thorough with good suggestions on how to improve.
- Teaching strategies are good but in the lessons observed when pupils had to work without the teacher's prompting, progress slowed.
- Pupils produce a wide range of work, not all of which can find its way into their exercise books. However, this means that their exercise books do not provide a complete-enough record of pupils' achievements in history which they can see.
- Pupils' attitudes are very good. All pupils engage well with what they are asked to do and they work well cooperatively.

### Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is judged to be good.

- The curriculum has an appropriate focus on skills which the school sees as having a general application beyond history. However, the school has also recognised the importance of pupils' historical knowledge if they are to understand the background to today.
- There has been a concerted approach to the development of cross-curricular links, for example, with art and the creation of high quality pictures of pharaohs and with the school's focus on Italian language and culture.
- There is a strong emphasis in the school on the government's Every Child Matters policy and this is increasingly being reflected in history. In consequence, teachers are beginning to innovate with the aim of making the history curriculum more relevant to the needs of pupils, helping them to understand the world in which they live.
- Such innovation has already occurred in Year 3; for example, census work on the local area and the school is developing plans for change in Years 4 to 6.
- Provision outside the regular timetable is outstanding. The 'Multicultural Month' (replacing 'Black History Month') produced impressive work; likewise the Tudor House project for homework in Year 5 provided opportunities for parents and carers to work with children and resulted in work of very high quality. A theatre workshop company works with all pupils; for example a workshop on 'Roman Ramifications' in Year 4. The local environment is very well exploited

with visits to Hampton Court, the Wallace Collection in Year 5, Imperial War Museum in Year 4 and the National Archive in Years 4 and 6.

## Leadership and management

The leadership and management of history are judged to be good.

- The coordinator evaluates the work in the subject very thoroughly and knows its strengths and weaknesses. He is also aware of the needs and interests of pupils and current national debates about the history curriculum and their implications.
- As a result, the innovations that have been introduced so far are having an outstanding impact; for example, changes in teaching and learning styles to give pupils more involvement in their own learning. Pupils are becoming active historians, asking questions and finding answers. The curriculum is also becoming more relevant to pupils.
- Further innovations are planned; for example, the introduction of a formal system of assessment which will improve even more teachers' understanding of pupils progress, the further development of cross curricular links, and the extension of self-assessment by pupils beyond Year 3.

## Subject issue: ICT

The use of ICT in history is outstanding.

- Teachers are keen to use ICT innovatively in their teaching and learning. Pupils and teachers make excellent use of interactive whiteboards; images and films are used regularly and there are immediate links to other websites which are also incorporated into teaching. The impact is to enhance pupils' understanding by providing an extended range of easily accessible resources.
- Pupils make frequent use of ICT as a research tool. Access to websites such as the Learning Curve's link to the National Archive census material has developed pupils' ability to research, think and communicate well.
- ICT is also used well for presentation; for example, Year 6's use of PowerPoint and 2Create on Britain since 1960. Cameras are used to make film and editing software used to process the results. Video conferencing is used in Year 5; for example, with the National Archive on Henry VIII. The school is just beginning to construct its 'virtual school' as part of the extended schools programme. There is a nascent 'history room' for history resources and repository of pupils' work.

## Subject issue: provision for gifted and talented history students

The provision for gifted history students is good.

- The school has a gifted and talented register but it has not yet been used to identify gifted historians. However, most lessons are differentiated by task and, in most instances, extension work is provided. For example, in Year 3, children investigate hieroglyphics.

The challenge for the more able is to research independently the Rosetta Stone using computers and then present their findings to the class.

- There is also targeted questioning for the more able pupils in teachers' planning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- the continued development of the curriculum to improve its relevance and links to other subjects
- introducing formal assessment and the further development of pupils' self-assessment.

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