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Mrs D Middlemass
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Middlemass

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 03 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 above average overall. The progress of some children is outstanding.

- Pupils in Key Stage 1 demonstrate considerable progress reflecting in particular, the schools' new curriculum initiatives.
- Pupils in Key Stage 2 produce thoughtful and well-argued hypotheses and judgements when interpreting sources, for example, in a Year 6 lesson on the life of Anne Frank. Models of Tudor buildings and paintings, particularly those of Tudor personalities, are excellent in quality.

- Pupils are acquiring good levels of knowledge and historical skills including the interpretation of sources although this is not always reflected in the written work of pupils, especially in Key Stage 2.
- Pupils very much enjoy the subject. In interviews they emphasised strongly the importance of studying the subject, enjoyed the topics studied and the opportunities provided, particularly visits to historical venues and visitors to the school to support events such as the creation of a Second World War museum and Victorian Day. Pupils said that teachers are always willing to help if they do not understand anything.
- Without prompting, older pupils said that the work was not always easy but it is challenging. Inspection evidence supports this view.
- The subject makes an excellent contribution to pupils' personal development in all age groups. In the classes visited, pupils' responses to the predicament of those caught up in the Great Fire of London and the story of Anne Frank showed considerable understanding.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Teachers are knowledgeable; they know well the subjects they are teaching. Planning is precise; objectives are clear. Lessons offer challenge and pace. Assessment of pupils' achievements is used to good effect with different activities provided for different pupils to suit their needs.
- An outstanding feature is teachers' use of interactive white boards linked to the school's recently created Managed Learning Environment (MLE) containing resources for teaching and learning. ICT is very well used by teachers and pupils
- Pupils apply themselves very well and are eager to undertake research. However, opportunities for pupils to take more initiative in their own learning in class are limited.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is judged to be good.

- Teachers have thought hard in recent times about the curriculum and have innovated cautiously but successfully. The development of a closer relationship between the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Key Stage 1 curricula now provides pupils with a meaningful historical experience which addresses historical knowledge and skills.
- The Key Stage 2 curriculum is in the process of development. It has been reorganised to provide pupils with a better chronological experience than previously. It addresses knowledge and skills and links with the present are made. However, there is scope for further development with finer tuning to meet pupils' current interests and needs.

Leadership and management

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

- All staff involved in the leadership and management of the subject, including the new coordinator, are enthusiastic, thoughtful but cautious innovators who value history and want the pupils to share this and do well.
- The coordinator and other staff have made an accurate assessment of the subject's strengths and weaknesses. Hence they are innovating well. Plans for future development are appropriate.
- There is effective, accurate monitoring of teaching to ensure quality.

Subject issue: ICT

The use of ICT in history is outstanding.

- Both teachers and pupils make extensive use of ICT for research, word processing, PowerPoint creation and presentation. In the case of teachers, the ability to access easily, high quality, relevant resources is a big help. Interactive white boards are very well used.
- The school's recently created MLE website is impressive. It is an on-line resource containing the resources used in lessons including PowerPoints, video clips and links to web-based material. It is also a repository for pupils' on-going work. Pupils value the resource highly, saying how useful it is when doing homework.
- A good example of MLE use was in the Year 6 lesson on Anne Frank when the sources available in the school's MLE website were not only presented professionally to pupils but were also used effectively during the lesson. A particularly positive feature is the way that all staff involved in history including ICT technicians are contributing to the site.
- The school makes good use of video conferencing, giving access to specialists in museums and elsewhere. It also enabled the school to join up with over sixteen other schools in Black History Month to explore aspects of black history.

Subject issue: provision for gifted and talented history students

The provision for gifted history students is good.

- The school regularly assesses the work of pupils and maintains electronic records. This, together with teachers' knowledge from the classroom means that it is relatively easy to identify gifted pupils.
- Work in class is adjusted to different needs but the main way the school encourages the gifted is through regular projects in history based on personal research, often at home. The quality of such work is generally good.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- providing pupils with more opportunities to take more initiative in their own learning in class
- developing the Key Stage 2 curriculum further to meet pupils' current interests and needs.

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