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23 February 2009

Mrs J Yendall
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Dear Mrs Yendall

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 12 January 2009 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 three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good and standards are above average.

- Pupils make good progress in developing their historical knowledge, skills and understanding. They can talk knowledgeably and confidently about the individuals they have researched and the periods they have covered.
- Younger pupils are developing a good understanding of chronology. They can sequence events accurately, for instance in relation to the Great Fire of London in 1666, and can explain how things change over time. Older pupils have good enquiry skills and enjoy investigating, for example about life in the cotton mills and life on the home front in the Second World War.

- Pupils' research skills are being well developed. They are encouraged to ask questions, seek out answers and use the information to produce accurate explanations. They have a good understanding of cause and consequence but their skills in historical significance and interpretation are underdeveloped.
- Pupils are well motivated in history and describe it as 'cool'. They willingly undertake homework activities, as seen in the models of Viking ships some have recently made.
- History makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development. Pupils are engaged in their lessons and are keen to learn. They work well individually and in groups. Behaviour is good.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teaching is lively and engaging, and teachers make learning interesting and fun. Questions are used effectively to make pupils think, and teachers use a variety of activities which maintain pupils' interest and help them to make good progress. The opportunity for Year 6 pupils to handle original objects brought into school by staff from the Herriot Museum in Thirsk, for example, helped them to appreciate what life was like for civilians in the early years of the Second World War.
- Lesson planning is thorough and ensures that all pupils are given work which meets their individual needs. Teaching assistants are well briefed and support pupils who require their help effectively.
- The process of establishing what pupils know and what they want to learn at the start of each topic helps to ensure that the teaching and learning reflects pupils' needs and interests. This approach is successfully capturing pupils' imaginations and helps to motivate them, as well as strengthen their learning.
- Pupils' work is marked, comments are helpful and teachers give praise. However, the comments do not indicate how pupils can improve their work in history.
- Pupils' progress is assessed and recorded. However, the formal assessment of progress in history according to National Curriculum levels is at an early stage.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is broad, balanced and meets requirements, with local history well represented. It is in the process of being revised to create an integrated structure which links subjects to themes. The school is aware of the importance of ensuring that the subject retains its integrity within the new curriculum framework.
- Cross-curricular links are strong. Literacy is well developed in history in all year groups. Opportunities are regularly taken to link with other subjects, for example with art when studying Egyptian wall hangings, and with design and technology when looking at Viking jewellery.

- The curriculum is enriched by visits to a large number of places of historical interest and by a number of visitors who come into school. Pupils in Year 6, for example, greatly enjoyed their visit to the Jorvik Museum in York. These visits are integrated into the schemes of work. They help to bring the subject to life, reinforce learning and help pupils to make good progress.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of history are good.

- The history coordinator is passionate about the subject, well organised and provides good leadership. She is developing a clear understanding of her role. Budgetary constraints mean that she cannot be readily released to observe formally other teachers' teaching. As a result, her work in monitoring teaching and learning and pupils' progress is underdeveloped.
- The coordinator's enthusiasm is shared by the rest of the staff who enjoy teaching history and feel well supported in their work. History is regarded as an important subject in preparing pupils for the future and in developing essential skills.
- The subject is well organised, planning is thorough and action plans have appropriate priorities. Record keeping is detailed and the extensive library of digital photographs of historical activities helps to provide the school with an accurate 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 improvement. For example, the school is aware that assessment in history is underdeveloped.

Subject issue: ICT

The use of ICT in history is good.

- Teachers use ICT regularly and effectively in lessons to enhance pupils' learning.
- Pupils have good access to computers, both in classrooms and in the ICT suite. They enjoy using the computers to word process their own work, to produce their own presentations and for research. Older pupils interrogate websites confidently. However, the policy of not allowing the pupils to use search engines such as Google means that an opportunity to develop their understanding of e-safety is missed.

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, and in independent learning activities for homework.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing assessment practice, particularly feedback, to ensure that pupils are given precise subject-specific advice on how they can improve their work
- consolidating the role of the subject coordinator so that she is able to monitor teaching and learning and pupils' progress more effectively.

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