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Mrs O Kolek
Headteacher
St Teresa's Catholic Primary School
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Dear Mrs Kolek

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 26 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 satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are average.

- Pupils show sound knowledge of the topics they are studying. They talked knowledgeably about the Second World War and about life in Tudor times. Older and more able pupils often show detailed knowledge about the modern world and talk fluently about what they have learnt.
- Pupils' grasp of historical skills is less secure than their subject knowledge. This partly reflects the uneven progress they have made throughout the school.

- The standard of pupils' work in history benefits from links which teachers make with literacy, including opportunities to promote speaking and listening.
- Pupils' personal development in history is good. They enjoy history and are eager learners. Their behaviour is usually very good, but dips when the work is insufficiently challenging or engaging.
- Pupils generally show good social skills when working with others. Older pupils in particular show good understanding of moral issues, as seen in their work on punishment of the poor in Tudor times.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Teaching is often good in lessons, but not all groups of pupils make the progress they should over time. Pupils learn best when lessons engage their interest and have appropriate levels of challenge.
- Teachers are enthusiastic about history and this in turn helps to promote pupils' enthusiasm. However, they have had limited professional development opportunities to extend their subject knowledge and expertise. This affects the confidence with which they teach aspects of the subject.
- Teachers make systematic use of approaches to teaching and learning promoted by the National Primary Strategy, including sharing learning objectives with pupils.
- Teachers provide varied activities for pupils. The best provide opportunities for pupils to explore historical evidence, sometimes as part of an extended research project, and consolidate their literacy skills. However, work is often insufficiently adjusted to meet the needs and abilities of different pupils, especially the more able.
- Marking is too variable. The best identifies the strengths in pupils' work and how they might improve, but some is cursory or focuses mainly on correcting spellings.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- The school has recognised that it needs to ensure greater coherence in its curriculum plans, especially to ensure the development of pupils' historical skills.
- Links are made with literacy, numeracy and ICT, but these are currently at the initiative of individual teachers. The school has identified that a structured overview would be beneficial to pupils' learning in history.
- The school provides a wide range of opportunities for visits and visitors to enrich its provision for history and pupils say how much they enjoy them.

Leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory.

- Recent changes to the leadership of the subject have resulted in the lack of a substantive co-ordinator for history. Although this is a temporary situation, and senior colleagues cover leadership of the subject satisfactorily, it has delayed some improvements that are urgently needed.
- The school has acknowledged that it does not have any systems in place for monitoring its provision in history or for tracking pupils' progress. The priorities it has identified for history have yet to be implemented effectively, including the monitoring of teaching and learning and providing guidance to teachers on how to set appropriately challenging tasks for all pupils.

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.

Subject issue: provision for gifted and talented history pupils

Provision for gifted and talented history pupils is satisfactory.

- At present, no pupil is identified as being gifted in history. However, the school is aware of those pupils who show particular strengths in the subject and satisfactory provision is made for them in lessons, for example through research and computer-based activities, and in independent-learning activities.
- The school has only recently begun to seek ways of extending the more able effectively.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- providing guidance in progression of historical skills and understanding to support teachers' planning
- acting on the priorities identified by the school, including developing the monitoring role of the new co-ordinator when she takes up her appointment
- monitoring 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

Peter Limm
Her Majesty's Inspector