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Mr R Grindrod
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Dear Mr Grindrod

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 09 March 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 are developing good historical knowledge and understanding. Pupils in Year 1, for example, know about life in Victorian times, while those in Year 4 know and understand about how children were affected by the Second World War.
- Pupils have good research and enquiry skills. They have the opportunity to look at a wide range of evidence, including artefacts, about Victorian times and life in the Second World War. Time lines are used to develop chronological understanding and pupils have a good understanding of change and continuity. However, their wider historical skills, such as interpretation, are not as well developed.

- History makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development. The pupils are well motivated and well behaved, enjoy their learning and take a pride in their work. They are willing to engage in discussion and work well in pairs and groups, as well as on their own. Relationships are good. They say that they enjoy history because it is 'fun' and it helps them to 'know about how the world developed'.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good, with some that is outstanding.

- Lessons are well planned and learning objectives are used effectively to support pupils' learning. Questioning is good and helps pupils to express their ideas clearly and to reflect on what they are learning. Pupils' interest is carefully nurtured and a range of activities and tasks helps to keep them focused and to reinforce their learning.
- Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported through specific tasks and the careful deployment of teaching assistants. More able pupils have the opportunity through research and computer-based activities to extend their knowledge and understanding, although the tasks set do not always challenge them sufficiently.
- Pupils' work is regularly marked. Praise is given and helpful comments are provided on how to improve. However, the guidance given tends to focus on literacy issues and does not include sufficient subject-specific advice.
- Pupils' achievement is assessed and recorded according to National Curriculum levels. The school is aware that the assessment recording system needs refining to improve the monitoring of pupils' progress.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is broad, balanced and meets requirements.
- Pupils enjoy the topics studied, including local history which is well represented at both key stages.
- The curriculum is being revised. The school is aware of the importance of ensuring that history retains its integrity within the new curriculum framework.
- Cross-curricular links are strong and literacy is well developed. Opportunities are readily taken to explore history themes in other subjects, for example with art and design and physical education, when looking at life for children in Britain during the Second World War.
- Visits to places of historical interest and visitors coming into school help to enrich the curriculum for all pupils. These experiences strengthen learning. The pupils who had visited Thackray Medical Museum and Eden Camp could describe and explain how the visits helped them with their learning back in school.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of history are good.

- The subject is well organised. Resources are stored centrally and the planning frameworks help to guide teachers in their preparation.
- Teachers like teaching history and are keen to ensure that the pupils enjoy and succeed in their learning. Senior leaders regard history as an important subject in the pupils' education and teachers appreciate the support they are given.
- The subject coordinator has a range of roles to fulfil. Nevertheless, she is developing a clear picture of the strengths and areas for development in history.
- The subject development plan is well focused. However, the absence of clear time frames has limited its impact, for example in improving the monitoring and evaluation of pupils' progress.

Subject issue: ICT

The use of ICT in history is good.

- Teachers use interactive whiteboards confidently to support learning and guide pupils well in their use of computers. For example, by identifying precise websites as a starting point, teachers help to ensure that pupils are quickly focused on their work.
- Pupils use computers for research and to word process their work. During the inspection, pupils in Year 3 used the interactive whiteboard well to explain to the rest of the class what they had discovered in their group work. However, they say that they would like to have more opportunities to use computers and other media in their learning.

Subject issue: provision for gifted and talented history students

At present, no pupils are identified as being gifted in history.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing the full range of pupils' historical skills
- improving marking and written feedback to ensure that pupils are given precise advice on how they can improve their work in history
- improving the systems and practices used to monitor and evaluate pupils' progress.

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