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Mrs D Cockrean
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Cockrean

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 22 September 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 the contribution of history to community cohesion and the development of independent learning in history.

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 learners, a scrutiny of relevant documentation, an analysis of pupils' work and the observation of one history lesson.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement is good.

- Pupils' attainment in this small school is above average in history, though this has not registered on the significance test for the school's general outcome indicators. The quality of pupils' work in their books, and as demonstrated in teacher assessments, has been consistently above average and is improving.

- The quality of pupils' learning and their progress is good. Pupils' knowledge of key events and persons in their history work is good. They develop a good understanding of important concepts, such as change over time and the significance of people in their wider history context. However, they do not have enough time to reflect on their history topics and to attain a deeper sense of the past. Writing skills have clearly improved through history, but pupils' extended writing skills are underdeveloped.
- The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is good. They receive good support from teaching assistants who demonstrate a good understanding of the lesson activities and encourage individual pupils to do their best.
- Pupils' personal development is good in history. Pupils say they think history is 'full of exciting things to do' and they like going on the many visits that are arranged for them. They behave very well in lessons and are good at relating to each other in small groups, encouraging each other and evaluating what they do together. They communicate their ideas clearly in lessons and speak confidently to others about their chosen topics. The quality of writing in books is good but opportunities for more extended writing are limited.
- Pupils talk knowledgeably about the topics they have studied. They especially like the way teachers use 'hands on' approaches where pupils can handle artefacts. They also like simulating events from the past.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is good.

- Teachers are enthusiastic about history and this is demonstrated by the many imaginative and stimulating activities and visits that are planned. Lessons are planned well to ensure that the needs of all pupils are taken into account. As a result, all pupils engage actively in history sessions.
- There is a good focus on developing skills in history and on enabling pupils to reach challenging targets, a feature that the school recognises needs further development, especially for the more able.
- Assessment procedures on a day-to-day basis are good and pupils said they felt that teachers kept a good eye on their progress and attainment.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly and there are helpful written comments in most of their books.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced. It has been reviewed recently to ensure that the new focus on skills does not dilute history learning contexts and content. There are good and growing links with other subjects.
- There is a good emphasis on the key elements of history and pupils are introduced effectively to key historical concepts, such as change over time and asking sensible questions with regard to historical evidence.
- There is good enrichment in the form of numerous visits to places of historical interest. The school has an international school award and is developing its links with schools in other countries so as to bolster pupils' knowledge and understanding of other areas of the world.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of history are good.

- History has been used well as a vehicle for developing wider school improvement strategies, such as more skills-based work. There is a clear vision about the place of history in the school curriculum.
- History is reviewed thoroughly each year. The self-evaluation indicates a good grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of the subject and priorities for development are clearly right for improving provision further.
- Policies and schemes of work are clear in outlining what has to be covered and how history can contribute to different subjects. Good identification of skills to be developed is linked well to history content.

Subject issue: the contribution of history to community cohesion

The contribution of history to community cohesion is satisfactory.

- History has helped pupils to understand their local community by providing a number of local history topics for study and investigation. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of the wider national and global communities are developing soundly. Opportunities are missed for this understanding and awareness to be more fully developed.
- There has not been an evaluation of the impact of these developments from the perspective of community cohesion.
- Pupils showed a good grasp of local, national and some world events but their experience of diverse cultures is limited.

Subject issue: the development of independent learning in history

The development of independent learning in history is good.

- Pupils are given many opportunities to follow up their own history interests and to present their findings to others in the class. For example, one pupil shared findings from his visit to a Roman villa with the rest of the class through a presentation.
- The school gives high priority to developing pupils' independent learning skills and, in history, this is demonstrated by many carefully planned and monitored investigations and research activities. Pupils said that they enjoyed these activities and the thinking and work that went with them.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- providing more opportunities for pupils to develop their extended writing skills
- ensuring pupils are given more time to explore their topics in greater depth to enable them to develop a better sense of the past.

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