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Mr N O'Neill & Mr J Carney
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Dear Mr O'Neill and Mr Carney

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 3 December 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff and pupils, a scrutiny of relevant documentation, an analysis of pupils' work and the observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- Pupils' language and literacy skills on entry to the school are broadly average. They make good progress in history across the school and have an above-average knowledge and understanding of the history topics they have studied by the end of Year 6. They acquire discrete historical skills at a good rate overall but their understanding of the range of historical evidence used by historians and their awareness of bias in history is less well developed.

- Pupils retell the story of history with accuracy and they make meaningful links between history and other topics, such as art and literacy. For example, pupils in Year 3 link the information they elicit from a picture of a Greek vase with the Battle of Marathon.
- In Year 5, pupils understand the importance and roles of a range of gods in the lives of people in Ancient Egypt. In Year 6, more able pupils ask their classmates perceptive questions during the role-play activities as part of the Victory in Europe day celebrations.
- Pupils' progress in the use of new technology, including the school learning platform and digital cameras, is outstanding. Younger pupils using computers benefit from the impressive support they receive from older pupils in Year 6.
- Pupils' personal development in history is excellent. Behaviour in lessons is outstanding and pupils are fully engaged in the activities. They enjoy supporting each other and look forward to opportunities to dress in historical costume, as climbing boys or maids in wealthy households, for example.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching of history is good.

- Teachers plan their lessons well and use a range of artefacts most effectively to motivate pupils and to give them an understanding of what life must have been like for people during the Second World War, for example.
- Questioning is good overall and teachers work hard to gauge how well pupils have understood the key elements of the topics studied. On occasion, however, there is insufficient challenge for more able pupils, often gifted and talented, to reach the highest levels. In these lessons, pupils are not always required to question the evidence available to them.
- Relationships between pupils and between pupils and the adults who work with them are very good. As a result, pupils have the highest regard for their teachers and teaching assistants and really enjoy history.
- Ongoing assessment in class is good and teachers often modify their approach in lessons to make sure that all pupils are making equally good progress. More formal assessment, however, is somewhat underdeveloped. The school recognises that more work needs to be done to ensure that assessment practice leads directly to accelerated progress and higher attainment.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the history curriculum is good.

- The curriculum fully meets requirements but there is a slight imbalance between the emphasis on pupils' knowledge and understanding and the opportunities they have to acquire discrete historical skills. For example,

pupils enjoy working as 'history detectives' but they have insufficient opportunities to do so.

- Some aspects of the curriculum are very impressive, such as pupils' use of new technology to reinforce their learning in history.
- Similarly, the opportunities they have to act as journalists interviewing fighter pilots and merchant seamen, for example, reinforce their understanding of life many years ago.
- Pupils speak positively of the many historical visits they have, to the Deva Museum, to Eden Camp and to Speke Hall, for example.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management of history is good.

- Subject coordinators are well qualified in history and are committed to the development of the subject across the school.
- They ensure that the history display on the corridors and in classrooms is vibrant and celebrates pupils' work.
- Planning is good and the school is justly proud of the wide variety of resources, artefacts and history-related software it possesses.
- Self-evaluation is accurate. The latest round of questionnaires confirmed just how popular history is in school. However, it also demonstrated that some older pupils are not fully certain of how well they are doing in the subject.

Subject issue: the contribution of history to community cohesion

The contribution of history to community cohesion is good.

- Teachers recognise that pupils benefit from opportunities to consider religions and cultures different to their own. Black History Month is, therefore, a key aspect of the school year and pupils study a range of topics which celebrate the achievements of relevant historical figures.
- The history of slavery is also a major element of the curriculum and teachers spend considerable time planning opportunities for pupils to celebrate difference and diversity.
- As a nationally accredited School of Excellence in Spanish, the link with the primary school in Spain gives pupils a deeper understanding of life in another European country.

Subject issue: the development of independent learning in history

The development of independent learning in history is outstanding.

- As a result of the school's outstanding use of the latest technology, pupils are exceptionally adept at using computers, digital cameras and film-making technology to pursue their interests in history.

- Pupils 'blog' their views on history topics on the learning platform and develop quizzes on historical figures, which are accessed at home by their classmates.
- Pupils have also produced 18 DVD films on a variety of historical themes, on evacuation and the Jarrow March, for example.
- Pupils' work in history is used to assess and evaluate their skills in information and communication technology (ICT).

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- placing greater emphasis on developing pupils' discrete historical skills
- increasing the challenge for more able pupils to reach even higher standards
- building on the strengths of the ICT-integrated assessment model to ensure that the measurement of pupils' progress in history leads to higher levels of attainment in the subject.

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

Jim Kidd
Additional Inspector