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Mr S Ayres  
Headteacher  
St John's CE Primary School  
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Dear Mr Ayres

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 18 March 2010 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, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- All pupils make good progress and standards of attainment are above average.
- Pupils demonstrate excellent knowledge and understanding of important historical events and people. For example, Year 4 pupils are able to talk confidently and knowledgeably about mining, its importance locally, the poor working conditions and dangers apparent for children at the time.
- Chronological understanding is also developing well across the school. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, regular opportunities to discuss daily

and weekly routines provide a good foundation for later work in history. As they get older, pupils are increasingly able to sequence more complex events and demonstrate a good understanding of concepts relating to the passage of time.

- Pupils are less confident in their knowledge and understanding of the wider range of historical skills. For example, pupils' understanding of historical interpretations and their skills of assessing the utility of historical evidence are less secure.
- History makes a very significant contribution to pupils' personal development and their attitudes and behaviour are excellent. One pupil captured the feelings of many when he said, 'I love it because it shows me something I have never heard of before'.

### Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Teachers and pupils share a great enthusiasm for the subject. Lessons are planned well to meet the needs of all pupils and effective support is given to those who need extra help. Lessons are characterised by a variety of challenging tasks which engages pupils as co-constructors of their own learning and development in history.
- History makes a very significant contribution to the development of pupils' literacy skills. Year 5 pupils produced outstanding examples of high-quality writing detailing 'a day in the life' of a castle noblewoman in 1295. The writing was clearly enhanced by the pupils' accurate knowledge and understanding of the period being studied. It was one of a number of excellent examples of extended writing seen across the school.
- Teachers have a clear understanding of what pupils should learn by the end of the lesson. However, learning goals are not always sufficiently focused on assessing historical skills and providing pupils with sharp pointers for making better progress.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively to support learning. For example, in a Year 3 lesson, pupils' understanding of the experiences of different people during the Battle of Britain was significantly enhanced by carefully selected audio clips and digital imagery.

### Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- The school is implementing a new, two-year cycle of team-based curriculum planning which focuses more on developing pupils' creativity. This thematic approach has led to a series of well-planned cross-curricular links which are enabling pupils to develop their knowledge well and make increasingly sophisticated connections between themes and subjects. However, clear strategies to plan for progression in pupils' understanding of key concepts and skills in history are not yet fully in place.

- The excellent range of visits and visitors for all year groups makes a significant contribution to the pupils' historical understanding, interest and engagement. Each new theme is launched with a whole day's 'history experience' to capture pupils' imagination. It is done through a variety of different experiences such as visits, visitors, use of artefacts, role-play, drama and the use of a theatre company. Pupils and teachers said how much they valued these opportunities.

#### Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of history is good.

- History is highly valued by school leaders and managers and makes a significant contribution to improving pupils' skills in other curriculum areas, for example in literacy and ICT. Effective self-evaluation means that there is a good understanding of the subject's strengths and areas for development.
- There is a clear pattern of monitoring and evaluation to secure improvement in the subject. For example, the school has identified that expected levels of progression in pupils' understanding of key historical concepts and skills are not yet set out clearly enough in school documentation. Plans are in place to tackle this in the forthcoming review of the impact of recent curriculum changes.
- Teachers are supported well by detailed planning and good teaching resources and ideas. However, the opportunities for teachers to attend and/or access history-specific training and development are limited.

#### Subject issue: the contribution of history to community cohesion

The contribution of history to community cohesion is good.

- History makes a good contribution to enhancing pupils' awareness and understanding of the local, national and global community. This is done adroitly through the emerging new curriculum and resulting cross-curricular links which build upon the good work done in history. Pupils were able to talk knowledgeably about how the local community had changed over time as well as the influence of key local figures, such as Thomas Telford.

#### Subject issue: the development of independent learning in history

The development of independent learning in history is good.

- History makes a significant contribution to the development of pupils' research skills. Pupils are inquisitive, eager to formulate their own questions and demonstrate real confidence in exploring their own learning. All of the lessons observed had good elements of independent learning and there was an appropriate balance of group and individual activities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- devising more rigorous strategies to plan for progression in pupils' understanding of wider historical skills and concepts across the school
- monitoring and evaluating the impact of this development on the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' overall achievement in history
- exploiting relevant subject-specific training opportunities for teachers.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop history in the school.

As I explained previously, 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

Karl Sampson  
Her Majesty's Inspector