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Mr R Jones  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Jones

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 25 February 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 satisfactory.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is satisfactory.

- Pupils make satisfactory progress and attain standards that are broadly average.
- Pupils demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of different historical periods. For example, Year 3 pupils are able to talk confidently and knowledgeably about life in Ancient Egypt.
- Chronological understanding is developing satisfactorily. Older pupils are able to place different periods and different objects in chronological order and younger pupils have a sound understanding of concepts relating to the passage of time.

- The development of pupils' understanding of other historical skills is satisfactory. All pupils are able to find out information from historical sources, and many are able to make supported inferences about the past. However, their understanding of historical interpretations and their skills of assessing the utility of historical evidence are less secure.
- History makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development. Pupils enjoy studying history and behave well in lessons. They particularly like practical activities and finding out about their local area.

### Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is satisfactory.

- Teachers and pupils share an enthusiasm for the subject. Learning activities are planned to meet the needs of all pupils and support is given to pupils who need extra help to develop their literacy skills.
- In some lessons, pupils are given good opportunities to work together to question historical evidence. For example, in a Year 5 lesson, pupils investigated life in Victorian boarding schools by studying letters written by children at the time.
- Teachers do not always provide sufficient time for pupils to think and reflect deeply enough upon learning activities. They do not focus enough 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. The internet is routinely used to select a good range of historical evidence as well as a means to promote visual literacy.

### Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is broad and meets requirements. It is driven by the units of study formulated by the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Authority. However, pupils do not always study the units to the required depth which limits the opportunity to develop fully their subject-specific and independent learning skills.
- The school is in the process of developing a 'creative curriculum' by establishing closer links between subjects. Though still developing, the links between history and other subjects such as literacy, ICT and art, design and technology are increasingly successful. For example, recent work on the Battle of Marathon was used effectively to support the development of pupil's journalistic writing skills.
- The good range of visits and visitors makes a significant contribution to the interest and engagement of pupils. Much useful work is undertaken in and around St Budueax. Pupils say how much they enjoy using the variety of artefacts brought by the 'Museum in Transit'.

## Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

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

- The subject leader is hard working, enthusiastic and dedicated both to the pupils and to the subject.
- She has a sound understanding of the strengths and areas for further improvement within the subject. For example, the school is aware that expected levels of progression in pupils' understanding of key historical concepts and skills are not set out clearly enough in school documentation. This makes it difficult for teachers to judge pupils' progress in history accurately.
- The work of the subject leader in monitoring planning is clearly established. However, her role in evaluating the effectiveness of history across the school is not fully developed.

Subject issue: the contribution of history to community cohesion

The contribution of history to community cohesion is satisfactory.

- Pupils are developing a sound understanding of the importance of the local community through visits to local places of historical interest and museums, such as the Royal Albert Bridge and Cotehele House.
- Pupils are inquisitive about, and have a developing knowledge and understanding of, other European and global cultures such as Ancient Egypt and Ancient Greece. However, the preparation of pupils for life in a culturally and ethnically diverse society is underdeveloped and the school is aware of this.

Subject issue: the development of independent learning in history

The development of independent learning in history is satisfactory.

- Most pupils are able to conduct their own research with increasing independence and are beginning to plan their own learning. They are inquisitive and increasingly able to identify questions to ask and problems to solve. For example, pupils were observed asking relevant questions to test a hypothesis.
- Pupils' understanding of what they need to do to improve their skills as independent learners is sometimes inhibited by a lack of opportunity to work on topics in more detail for extended periods.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that pupils are given more consistent opportunities to work in greater depth on topics within the history curriculum which support the development of subject-specific and independent learning skills

- ensuring there is an explicit and well-defined approach to progression in subject-specific skills to raise standards and enable teachers and pupils to evaluate and promote progress more effectively.

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