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Mrs J Smith
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Smith

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 8 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 extent 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; conversations with students and observation of their reactions to teaching and other events; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work and individual education plans; and observation of a sample of eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good

- Most students at the school have very complex needs and generally work at levels reflected by the P scales that are below the national curriculum levels. There are a small number of more able students who work around National Curriculum Levels 1 and 2.
- Over time, many students progress, often significantly, in relation to their starting points.

- Many of the students at this school are working on gaining basic skills that provide an effective foundation for history-specific skills. Students make good progress in developing these skills during history lessons.

Quality of teaching and learning in history

Teaching and learning in history are good.

- Teachers understand their students very well. For example, they know that a movement of the head or slight change of expression in response to a historical picture, for some pupils, demonstrates recognition. Teachers and support staff are also enthusiastic and have a great deal of expertise.
- More able students are supported well; for example in an assembly about Brunel. In one class, students responded well to pictures of a local church.
- Behaviour management is excellent.
- Assessment is used well, adding to teachers' understanding of students.
- Students enjoy the lessons in which history is involved. One example of this was that students concentrated well when investigating pictures in a lesson about the seaside: past and present.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum in history is good.

- The curriculum has recently been redesigned around historical themes which also provide students with opportunities to experience different situations and to develop skills and understanding. The overarching concept for these themes is 'Knowledge and Understanding of the World'.
- It is designed to be responsive to students by covering themes that are of interest and relevance to them, for example, the unit for 11 to 13-year-olds on the passage of time, contrasting the past with the present.
- Though new, its impact has so far been successful. However, the school is rightly monitoring it over a longer period and recognises that improvement is possible.
- The links with citizenship for older students are also successful.
- Opportunities for students to use a wide range of materials are built into the curriculum, as are opportunities for teachers to use interactive whiteboards successfully. Good use is made of local historical resources outside the school.
- The curriculum for students with the greatest needs does not contain any history.

Leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is good.

- The subject leader has an excellent understanding of how the subject can be set in the broader context of developing students' overall knowledge and skills.
- Working in close collaboration with you, she has worked very hard on developing the new curriculum and has been successful in encouraging all staff to use it.
- Self-evaluation is thorough and long-term development plans are relevant, clear and exciting.

Subject issue: the contribution of history to community cohesion

The contribution of history to community cohesion is outstanding.

Central to all the school does is the encouragement it gives to help students understand and support each other. Students respond very well to this and it is one reason why behaviour in history lessons is so good. As a result, community cohesion in the school is excellent and this has an impact on the wider community. The new curriculum, based on knowledge and understanding of the world, is essentially outward looking. This is illustrated well not only by the way in which history works alongside other subjects, such as geography in integrated topics, but also by the success of visits to local historical sites. For more able students, specific projects, such as Black History week, focus on the Caribbean and also involve art and music.

Subject issue: the development of independent learning in history

The school successfully empowers students as much as possible. Whenever the occasion allows, students in history are encouraged to work independently. Experiences such as cutting, simple drawing, and for some students, acting short sequences about stories and historical events, are very successful in building social awareness and self-confidence.

The area for improvement, which we discussed, is:

- ensuring the new curriculum continues to develop its objective of expanding students' knowledge and understanding of the world through the study of history alongside other subjects.

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

Paul Armitage
Additional Inspector