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Mr D Monks  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Monks

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 1 and 2 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, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of nine lessons illustrating what the school provides across a wide range of subjects and activities.

The overall effectiveness of history is outstanding.

Achievement in history

- Pupils' abilities generally vary considerably but none achieves a National Curriculum level in any subject. The average standard achieved in literacy and numeracy is P level 5. The last whole-school report in March 2009 judged pupils' progress in all subjects and activities as outstanding.
- Pupils' standards and progress in history alone are impossible to judge. History is a simple but very useful entry point for the development of more general literacy, numeracy and personal skills which are well-focused on the needs of pupils. Learning in history, as such, is often understandably superficial and short-lived.

## Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is outstanding.

- Teachers use very simple history as a brief entry point for broader skills development. This is done very successfully. For example, in one class where the pupils had severe special educational needs and/or disabilities, Roman history, in the form of making and painting beads, was used as a basis for sensory experiences. It was also aimed at developing pupils' ability to follow instructions. In a class for autistic pupils, plastic toboggans were used as Roman chariots to acquaint pupils with movement.
- In these classes, it was clear that teachers have high expectations of pupils and themselves, though the emphasis was on general skills rather than history. The patience and care of teachers and teaching assistants are striking.
- Teachers' knowledge and understanding of history are good and they are able to adapt excellently to the needs of pupils by integrating with other subjects and activities very well. As a result, pupils respond well, are well-behaved and happy.

## Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is outstanding.

- The curriculum in history is limited in depth but is chosen very carefully. The focus is very much on pupils' basic needs rather than history, although using history as an entry point provides pupils with variety and interest. For example, in a Key Stage 3 class looking at China, the teacher encouraged simple discussion and pupils working together using a range of modern and historical artefacts.
- This variety and interest are not only of value to pupils, but also important to teachers. Using history to help deliver the basic skills curriculum maintains teachers' interest and enthusiasm.

## Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in history is outstanding.

- This is most evident in the way in which you and other senior managers have focused clearly on pupils' needs and, with the cooperation of other staff, have adjusted the curriculum and teaching to target the needs of pupils. Senior managers' approach to history's limited role in the school's provision is both thoughtful and successful.

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

The contribution of history to community cohesion is outstanding.

- A key aim of the school is the creation of a cohesive, inclusive community. It does this successfully. Pupils live together happily. However, the school has recognised that it has a duty to prepare pupils for life outside school and that its ethnic profile is narrow. Although the primary means for meeting these issues are elsewhere, the school has made very successful use of history. It has arranged for Native American dancers to perform in the summer term and a simple version of the story of Native Americans will be built around the dancers' visit. This has also already happened in relation to a recent visit by African drummers. The school runs a Black History week covering, in different years, Africa, India and the West Indies. All of these activities are undertaken at appropriately simple levels and there is evidence that pupils develop a limited sense of unity as well as diversity. For example, awareness of others as well as sensory stimulation and movement are very important and, during the study of slavery, pupils were huddled together in a slave ship.

Subject issue: the development of independent learning in history

The development of independent learning in history is outstanding.

- Another key aim of the school is to encourage pupils to become more independent. Aspects of this are seen in everything the school does and history also plays a part. A good example of this is among pupils aged 14 to 19 where the school now gives them a choice of afternoon activities linked to life after school, including further education. Acts of selection, decision-making and seeing decisions through to the end are emphasised. Examples of choices students are asked to make in integrated English and history include choosing which people to study, for example, John Lennon or Nelson Mandela.

Areas for improvement

No areas for improvement were identified but, in the context of the limited history taught in the school, there was useful discussion about the role of individual subjects and whether, in some instances, integration has gone too far. There was also discussion about how history can be made relevant to pupils. However, it was concluded that the needs of the pupils must come first and, so far, through its integrated approach which includes some history, the school has developed very successfully.

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