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Dear Miss Turner

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 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 three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with below and often well below age-related skills in communication, language and literacy. They make good progress in history across the school and all groups achieve well, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of the history topics they are studying. Pupils in Year 2, for example, are fascinated by dinosaurs and also talk confidently about what they have learnt from their work on 'the finding of the frozen mammoth'.

- In Year 4, pupils compare and contrast the Ancient Greek theatre with the modern theatre they have visited. They also understand and define key historical vocabulary in relation to theatres in Ancient Greece.
- Pupils in Year 6 have a keen understanding of life in Victorian times and talk with confidence about climbing boys and mudlarks. They can also accurately compare life in Victorian London with the key elements of the Home Front during the Second World War.
- Pupils acquire historical skills at a good rate but are not always fully aware of the range of evidence which historians use to make their judgements about the past. More able pupils define bias accurately and talk confidently about the difference between fact and opinion in history. However, the skills of other pupils in this regard are underdeveloped.
- Pupils love history and their personal development is outstanding. Behaviour and engagement in lessons are of the highest order and pupils are more than willing to ask and answer questions to move their own and their classmates' learning forward.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Teachers' planning is comprehensive and their teaching methods and resources are designed to meet the differing needs of pupils of all levels of ability. However, on occasions, teaching does not foster pupils' development of historical skills effectively enough.
- Teaching assistants support pupils who find the work difficult most effectively and, as a result, these pupils make the same good progress as their peers. Relationships are strong and pupils speak highly of their teachers and teaching assistants.
- Pupils have many opportunities to work in groups and to act as resources for each other. They often share their personal research with their classmates and are more than willing to answer questions posed by their peers about the personal research they have completed.
- Pupils have good information and communication technology skills and use a range of computer-based resources, including the internet, for their research.
- Ongoing assessment in class is good and teachers know their pupils well. Marking is regular and gives pupils accurate advice on how they can improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is outstanding.

- History has pride of place within the new thematic curriculum and there is a range of historical modules which fosters progression in pupils'

acquisition of knowledge and understanding and also in their development of historical skills.

- Pupils have a wealth of opportunities to develop empathy with people in the past and they value the range of drama activities, for example in the Victorian school room, in which they can take part.
- There is an outstanding range of enrichment activities, including the evacuees visit to Eden Camp and the Tudor Workshop for pupils in Year 4.
- Pupils are published authors, too, and they have worked with a local historian on writing Ending the Slave Trade with William Wilberforce of Hull.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is good.

- The subject area runs well on a day-to-day basis and there are good levels of teamwork among staff when planning the curriculum and preparing lessons.
- Self-evaluation of performance in history is accurate and the subject coordinator is fully aware of areas which need to be developed further. Indeed, staff are fully committed to enhancing their pupils' experiences in history and work hard to complement learning in the classroom by a variety of extra-curricular activities.
- The school is justly proud of its links with the local authority, museums and theatre companies, which provide a wealth of books, artefacts and drama experiences to reinforce pupils' learning.

Subject issue: the contribution of history to community cohesion

The contribution of history to community cohesion is good.

- The school's historical link with the Sailors' Families Society and its situation in the grounds of the former Newland Homes Orphanage are instrumental in promoting pupils' strong relations with the immediate environment.
- Pupils celebrate the range of cultures represented in the school and they have a good understanding of cultures and religions which are different from their own. The historical theme Who Do We Think We Are? and the study of the career of Mary Seacole, for example, complement this understanding and give pupils opportunities to examine their own and their classmates' origins.

Subject issue: the development of independent learning in history

The development of independent learning in history is good.

- Pupils are expected to take responsibility for their own learning and work in groups and 'expert groups' to act as resources for each other. On

occasions, pupils share their research with their classmates and discuss similarities and differences between periods of history.

- Pupils are proud to act as 'history detectives' and, from the Early Years Foundation Stage onwards, have written their own historical booklets: African Pictures, Celebrations of Africa, The Great Escape of Harriett Tubman and Being a Slave are just four examples of pupils' impressive independent research.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- making pupils more aware of the range of evidence which historians use to make their judgements
- enhancing pupils' understanding of the differences between fact and opinion.

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

Jim Kidd
Additional Inspector