

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr S Heal
Headteacher
Holy Trinity Church of England School, Calne
Quemerford
Calne
Wiltshire
SN11 0AR

Dear Mr Heal

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 23 June 2010 to look at work 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 without their consent.

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.

- Pupils make good progress and attain standards that are above average.
- Pupils demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of features of life in different historical periods. For example, Year 4 pupils can explain confidently and accurately about life in Ancient Egypt. They recognise that the Egyptians' lives might be interpreted differently according to whether rich or poor people were the focus of study.
- Chronological understanding is also developing well across the school, especially, within each individual topic. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, regular opportunities to discuss daily and weekly routines provide a good foundation for later work in history. However, some older pupils are less secure when trying to accurately sequence different historical periods across a larger expanse of time.

- Pupils are developing good enquiry skills and use these to draw inferences from a range of evidence and make reasoned conclusions about the past. Pupils' understanding of historical interpretations and their skills of assessing the usefulness of historical evidence are less secure.
- History makes a strong contribution to pupils' personal development and their attitudes and behaviour are excellent. They enjoy the subject very much; 'it's fascinating', one said. Pupils particularly enjoy finding out about the past, posing their own questions and debating and discussing their ideas.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Teachers and pupils share a great enthusiasm for the subject. History is presented as an organic subject, best explored and investigated by pupils. Pupils said how much they appreciate this approach.
- Learning activities are planned well to meet the needs of all pupils through a variety of challenging and engaging tasks.
- Support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is good because of careful planning and good dialogue between teachers and teaching assistants. Consequently, these pupils make similar progress to their peers.
- Teachers have a clear understanding of what pupils should learn by the end of the lesson and skilfully reshape lesson activities in the light of pupils' responses. However, learning goals are not always sufficiently focused on assessing historical skills.
- Teachers' marking is frequent, evaluative and encouraging but it seldom provides subject-specific guidance on how pupils might improve their work and develop their historical skills.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- The school has implemented a two-year rolling programme of history topics which incorporates a whole-school approach to the development of pupils' generic learning skills. This approach is supported by well-planned cross-curricular and cross-phase links which are enabling pupils to develop their knowledge well and make increasingly sophisticated connections between themes and subjects.
- The use of local history is a strong feature of the school's curriculum. Pupils show good knowledge and understanding of local historical events and people. For example, Year 2 pupils are able to talk confidently and knowledgeably about the importance of Avebury, its development over time and the work of the archaeologist Alexander Keiller in the 1930s.

- The good range of visits makes a significant contribution to the pupils' historical understanding, interest and engagement. Much useful work is undertaken in partnership with local museums.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

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

- The subject leader has a clear commitment to the importance of history in the primary curriculum. Effective self-evaluation results in a good understanding of the subject's strengths and areas for development.
- Teachers assess pupils' achievement in history regularly as part of their planning and monitoring cycle. This results in an accurate view of the overall progress made by pupils in each year group.
- Teachers are supported well by detailed planning and good teaching resources and ideas. However, the subject leader is aware that expected levels of progression in pupils' understanding of key historical concepts and processes are not yet set out sufficiently clearly in school documentation. As a result, the monitoring and evaluation of pupils' progress in the development of these wider historical skills are limited.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that pupils' wider historical skills are more coherently and consistently developed across the school by:
 - devising an explicit and well-defined approach to planning for progression in pupils' understanding of these skills
 - ensuring that pupils' progress in the development of historical skills are monitored and evaluated more rigorously
 - ensuring that assessment opportunities provide pupils with sharp pointers on how to improve their work in history

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 under the URN for your school. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Karl Sampson
Her Majesty's Inspector