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Mrs L Williams  
Headteacher  
Aston St Mary's Church of England Aided Primary School  
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Dear Mrs Williams

### **Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: history**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 26 September 2011 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 three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

#### **Achievement in history**

Achievement in history is good.

- Pupils are extremely enthusiastic about history and have good in-depth knowledge about the topics they have studied. They make good progress over time and the attainment of older pupils is above average.
- Pupils have a good sense of period as a result of good opportunities for cross-curricular working, particularly through literacy, art, and design technology.
- Pupils also have a good sense of the past as a result of good opportunities to engage with members of the local community, for example through interviews with adults who experienced life during the Second World War.
- Pupils' understanding of the full range of historical skills is less consistent. For example, some older pupils were not fully secure in their

understanding of chronology, and particularly how long ago some of the events they have studied took place.

- History makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development. Older pupils can explain why history is important. As one said, 'history tells us about the lives of our grandparents and ancestors'.

### **Quality of teaching in history**

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Lessons benefit from teachers' enthusiasm for history and the creative ways in which they bring the subject to life, for example through role play or through investigating artefacts from different periods. Pupils report that they enjoy history because of the varied activities which characterise lessons.
- Teachers set challenging learning goals in lessons which focus on developing pupils' skills of enquiry. Pupils respond well to carefully planned opportunities to work in pairs and small groups to find out about the past. In one lesson seen, the most able pupils in Year 4 made good progress in deciding what historians might infer from a range of artefacts from the Aztec civilisation.
- While teaching is good overall, teachers' use of assessment to support learning in history is only satisfactory. This sometimes results in lower attaining and younger pupils making only satisfactory progress because the challenging lesson objectives are not matched well enough to pupils' prior attainment in history. On these occasions, some pupils find the work too hard.

### **Quality of the curriculum in history**

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of activities designed to strengthen pupils' knowledge and understanding of the past. Learning is enhanced by a good range of visits to sites of historical interest and through cross-curricular days which focus, for example, on life in Roman or Victorian times. Good links with local museums are used to exploit resources and expertise that would not be otherwise available.
- The curriculum has been skilfully planned to maximise the impact of teachers' own expertise and to ensure coverage of an appropriate range of topics. This is a significant achievement given the challenge presented by an increase in the proportion of mixed-age classes, particularly in Key Stage 2.
- Planning for progression in history has recently been strengthened with the result that opportunities to develop pupils' subject-specific skills are now clearly mapped. These strategies are beginning to strengthen teachers' use of assessment to support learning. However, they have not had time to have their full impact in building teachers' and pupils' understanding of the component parts which make for effective learning.

## **Effectiveness of leadership and management in history**

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is good.

- The subject coordinator is extremely well-organised and ensures that teachers are well supported in their delivery of history through shared resources and lesson ideas.
- Good systems of quality assurance, including work sampling, lesson observations and interviews with pupils ensure that the leaders and managers have a strong understanding of the strengths and areas for development. The history action plan articulates clearly the next steps needed to secure further improvement. There is good capacity for sustained improvement.
- The subject leader has made good use of professional development opportunities to strengthen the quality of teaching, the curriculum and the use of assessment. These are having a clear impact in strengthening the quality of provision.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- fully embedding recent strategies to strengthen planning for progression and the use of assessment to ensure that:
  - teachers and pupils have a clear understanding of how well pupils are developing their skills in each of the component parts which make for effective learning
  - teaching is consistently well-matched to the needs and prior attainment of all pupils, particularly younger pupils and lower-attaining pupils.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop history in the school.

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Daniel Burton**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**