

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 P Davis
Headteacher
Mexborough Doncaster Road Junior School
Doncaster Road
Mexborough
South Yorkshire
S64 0LU

Dear Mr Davis

Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 8 May 2012 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. A number of learning walks were also undertaken to look at displays and visit the classes not otherwise observed.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- By the end of Year 6, pupils make good progress in developing their historical knowledge and understanding. Pupils in Year 4 can describe in detail their work on the Tudors and the space race, and those in Year 6 can explain what life was like in Ancient Egypt and for civilians in the Second World War.
- Pupils have good research and enquiry skills. They particularly enjoy being asked at the start of a topic what they know and what they would like to find out. Older pupils noted that this approach helped make history more interesting and engaging. They added that making a visit at the start of a topic, such as that to Eden Camp, made them want to find out more about the topic, in this case the Second World War.

- Pupils' understanding of the full range of historical skills is mixed. For example, they can accurately sequence images of homes in the past. However, they are unsure how evidence might be checked for accuracy and how and why people interpret the past in different ways.
- Pupils write well and present their ideas in a range of writing styles. However, opportunities for developing their discursive history writing skills are limited.
- The contribution of history to pupils' personal development is good. They are inquisitive and enthusiastic, and say that history is 'fun'. Older pupils are convinced of the value of studying history because, in the words of one Year 6 pupil, 'It's important because it makes you wonder and ask questions about why the world is like it is'.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Lessons are carefully planned and learning is matched to pupils' needs. Displays celebrate pupils' achievements, the range of activities adopted and the wealth of resources available in the school for teaching and learning in history.
- Teaching is particularly effective when the learning is enquiry based and the pupils are focused on answering a specific question which requires research.
- Good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT). Teachers use digital projectors and whiteboards well and pupils use ICT regularly to support their learning.
- Pupils' work is carefully marked. Comments are helpful but they are too general and do not give sufficient subject-specific advice on how pupils can improve their work.
- Pupils' work is assessed according to National Curriculum levels of attainment. However, assessing progress in subject-specific skills is underdeveloped. As a result, teachers do not have a clear enough understanding of how well pupils are developing the full range of subject-specific skills.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum in history is good.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced, and is being revised to make the links between subjects more explicit. However, the school recognises the importance of making sure that pupils continue to study sufficient British history and that the subject retains its identity and integrity within the emerging curriculum framework.
- Cross-curricular links are strong and help to develop pupils' sense of period. Work in history makes a positive contribution to the development of their literary skills.

- The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of visits to sites of historical interest which successfully strengthens pupils' knowledge and understanding of the past. Good links with the local library and museum services are used to exploit additional resources and expertise.
- Pupils also benefit from opportunities to interact with members of the local community who organise the local history society and who contribute to the work undertaken by pupils in Years 3 and 4 on the history of Mexborough.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is good.

- History is well organised and well resourced. Planning is thorough in all year groups. Teachers enjoy teaching history and work well as a team.
- The subject coordinator undertakes his role with commitment and provides good support for his colleagues.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and the coordinator has an accurate understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in history. However, the school is aware that the monitoring and evaluation of pupils' progress in their subject-specific skills is underdeveloped.
- Professional subject-specific training for teachers has not taken place for several years. Although links with neighbouring primary and secondary schools are in place, they have not yet been exploited to update teachers' knowledge and understanding of some of the more recent developments in the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that pupils' wider historical skills are more thoroughly developed across the school and that pupils' progress in the development of the full range of historical skills is assessed, monitored and evaluated more rigorously
- providing more opportunities for pupils to develop their discursive history writing skills
- developing marking and written feedback to ensure that pupils are given precise subject-specific advice on how they can improve their work
- making better use of local networks and clusters to ensure that staff update their knowledge and understanding in the subject through relevant professional development.

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

Michael Maddison
Her Majesty's Inspector