

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6644
www.ofsted.gov.uk



08 November 2006

Mr J Leake
Headteacher
Birchley St Mary's Catholic Primary School
Birchley Road
Billinge
WN5 7QJ

Dear Mr Leake

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme - History

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during the visit I made on 07 November 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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half term.

I undertook to provide a brief written version of the main points made in my feedback at the end of the visit, to support development in history. This follows. The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

In relation to both subject knowledge and the acquisition of historical skills, standards at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 are well above the national average and pupils' achievement is outstanding.

- Pupils have many opportunities to develop historical skills and, as early as the Reception year, children can see themselves in the context of their families and can already understand the key features of chronology.

- By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils have an understanding of the nature of primary evidence and talk confidently and accurately about Guy Fawkes's part in the Gunpowder Plot.
- In Key Stage 2, pupils make perceptive comments on the usefulness of a range of evidence and produce written work in a variety of genres, for example instructional text on mummification. By Years 5 and 6 they interpret both visual and textual evidence accurately, write moving poems on the Jarrow Crusade and have impressive background knowledge of the reasons for the outbreak of war in 1939.
- Pupils are fascinated by history, question the evidence available to them and speak highly of both the subject and their teachers. They behave impeccably, work maturely together and support each other's learning in pairs and in groups.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding.

- Teachers treat their pupils with dignity and have the highest expectations of what they can achieve.
- Lesson preparation is comprehensive and designed to foster the progress of pupils of all levels of ability.
- Teachers ask challenging questions of their pupils, encourage them to make contributions in class and require them to justify their views with evidence.
- Skills in historical enquiry and literacy are fostered in all lessons and teachers pass on their own enthusiasm for the subject to their pupils. The emphasis on speaking and listening is a major feature of lessons in all key stages.
- Teachers use new technology with skill and verve and the many PowerPoint presentations in lessons fascinate the pupils. Pupils use computers very effectively also and children as young as six produce newspaper reports with a skill which belies their years. The school's national reputation for excellence in ICT is fully supported by history work in the *Cyberlab*.
- Marking is outstanding and pupils benefit from detailed comment which shows them how they can improve their work.
- Ongoing assessment in class is equally impressive: teachers have a keen understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of all their pupils and amend their practice accordingly.

Quality of the curriculum

History has a very high profile in school and the curriculum is outstanding.

- The *Time Tunnel* is a superb resource for National Curriculum history and is all the more remarkable because it was constructed by pupils of all levels of ability.
- The curriculum in all years comprises the ideal balance between factual content, the development of historical skills and the emphasis on literacy in all its forms.
- Learning through doing is a major aspect of the history curriculum and pupils enjoy the wide range of visits, to Styal Mill and Liverpool Museum, for example. They speak positively of the opportunities they have to meet the *Demon Headmaster* and also to dress up in Tudor costume at Tatton Park.

Leadership and management of history

Leadership and management are outstanding.

- The history co-ordinator has an accurate view of the effectiveness of the subject in the school. She leads her staff by example and her teaching demonstrates exemplary practice.
- The monitoring of teaching, learning, standards and the curriculum are well embedded and self-evaluation is a matter of routine. Strategies put in place to introduce more extended writing in the history curriculum have been very effective and this issue from the previous report has been fully addressed.
- Departmental documentation is very impressive and gives the utmost support to non-specialists.
- All teachers share a clear vision for how history may be developed further but would benefit from more opportunities for subject-specific in-service training.

Inclusion

Achievement of pupils of all levels of ability is outstanding

- Teaching, the curriculum and support in lessons ensure that each individual has full access to what the subject has to offer.
- Pupils in Year 6 support Reception children very effectively with their work in ICT, as an element of the development of chronological skills.

- Lower ability pupils often surprise themselves at what they can do as a result of realistic challenge and full support from their teachers and teaching assistants.
- The needs of pupils of higher ability are met, too, and some of the assignments produced by those in Year 5 and Year 6 would not go amiss in a secondary school.

Literacy

History teaching and the history curriculum make an outstanding contribution to pupils' literacy skills.

- Curriculum planning and lesson preparation are linked closely to the development of pupils' skills in literacy.
- Speaking and listening are emphasised and, in many classes, extended comment, using the correct terminology, on historical issues is the norm. Pupils are articulate and respond positively to the many opportunities they have to present their work to their classmates.
- Extended writing is introduced as early as Year 2 and by Year 6, pupils are writing newspaper reports, diaries, non-chronological texts and poems with confidence. Older pupils have also produced booklets on myths and legends with a partner school in Northern Ireland.

Overall effectiveness of the subject

Provision in history is outstanding. Pupils reach high standards in both history and literacy and, irrespective of their levels of ability, make excellent progress in the development of historical skills. Teaching and learning are outstanding and both teachers and pupils use ICT very effectively. The rich and varied curriculum fascinates the pupils and outstanding leadership and management ensure that the subject goes from strength to strength.

There are no significant areas of weakness but more subject-specific in-service training could benefit non-specialist staff.

Thank you once again for your kindness during my visit. I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop history in the school.

Yours sincerely

Jim Kidd
Additional Inspector