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07 April 2009

Mrs J Baker
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Baker

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on Wednesday 11 March 2009 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 provision for gifted pupils and the use of information and communication technology (ICT).

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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included interviews with staff and pupils, a scrutiny of relevant documentation, an analysis of pupils' work and the observation of two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Pupils of all abilities make good progress in developing their historical knowledge and writing skills. They benefit greatly from a number of first hand experiences of historical sites and from the extremely well planned project work that develops from them. Pupils say that they enjoy these activities enormously.
- Pupils' personal development is good in history. Pupils say they think history is 'full of exciting things to do' and they like thinking about key people in the past. They like learning about their own history interests, which the school encourages. They behave very well in lessons and are

good at relating to each other in small groups, encouraging each other and evaluating what they do together. They communicate their ideas clearly in lessons, especially about their own individual interests which are often presented using models that have been made of the items that have captured their imaginations. The quality of written work in books and folders is good. This reflects well on the school's new focus on improving literacy generally.

- Pupils talk knowledgeably about the topics they have studied. They especially like the way teachers use the interactive whiteboards to demonstrate key points and to show videos of key aspects of their topics. They also like interrogating artefacts and other forms of evidence provided by the local museum service and Somerset Records Office.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers are enthusiastic about history and this is demonstrated by the many imaginative and stimulating activities that are planned for lessons and visits. They develop good relationships with pupils.
- Lessons are planned well to ensure that the needs of all pupils are taken into account and, as a result, all pupils engage actively in history sessions. The school works well in a cluster of local schools and teachers have good opportunities to share their ideas and use activities that have worked well in other contexts. The more able benefit from these links.
- Assessment procedures on a day-to-day basis are good and pupils said they felt that teachers kept a good track of their progress. The school rightly acknowledges that its work on developing assessment lacks sufficient detail about individual levels of attainment, but there are good plans in place to address this.
- Teaching assistants are used effectively to support pupils with learning difficulties.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly and there are helpful written comments in most books.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced. There is a weekly slot for history supplemented well by a rolling programme of topics through each of the key stages, of which at least two each year have a major history focus.
- Key historical skills are also developed through well coordinated links with other subjects. There are also living history days which are provided both at school, such as the Anglo-Saxon day, or by visiting local historical sites such as Dunster Castle or the Great Western Railway at Bishops Lydeard.

- The school regularly invites local people into school to discuss their experiences of changes in the past, or the kinds of toys they found interesting when they were young.
- There is a good emphasis on the key elements of history and pupils are introduced well to key historical concepts, such as change over time, and to asking appropriate questions using evidence.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of history are good.

- The subject coordinator is relatively new to the post, but has good ideas about how history can be developed in the school. She is supported well by all teachers who meet regularly to share ideas and plan stimulating lessons.
- History is reviewed rigorously each year and the priorities for development are well focussed on improving provision further.

Subject issue: provision for gifted history pupils

The provision for gifted history pupils is good.

- The school exploits its local cluster links well to ensure that there are plenty of opportunities for able young history pupils to follow their interests and produce very interesting work. The headteacher is aware that links to national gifted and talented provision are at an early stage of development.

Subject issue: the use of ICT in history

The use of ICT in history is good.

- ICT is used well across the school to extend and deepen pupils' understanding of history topics. The school makes good use of a wide range of ICT materials and interactive websites to strengthen pupils' learning.
- Links with the museum service enable teachers to use a number of good mixed media resources for learning.
- Pupils regularly use websites to acquire information for use in their writing.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improve assessment in history so that that all teachers can accurately evaluate the different levels of attainment achieved by pupils
- exploit further the local cluster arrangements to gain more awareness of what is available through national provision for gifted and talented pupils.

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

As I explained in my previous letter, 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

Peter Limm
Her Majesty's Inspector