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22 May 2009

Ms M Curry
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Ms Curry

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: History

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during the visit on 14 May 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 the contribution of history to community cohesion and the development of independent learning 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.

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

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' achievement is good and standards are average.

- Pupils make good progress in lessons and their achievement over time is good. Pupils in Year 2, for example, know the basic facts about the life of Olaudah Equiano, the Great Fire of London and Samuel Pepys.
- Older pupils in Year 5 make good progress in developing their understanding of the Blitz during the Second World War and are aware of other aspects of the war, for example evacuation and rationing.
- At all ages, pupils can evaluate historical sources well. They know about reliability, can make inferences and they can detect bias. Some pupils have a good appreciation of chronology.

- Pupils enjoy learning history and relationships in lessons are excellent.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good with outstanding features.

- Teachers plan their lessons well and take into account the needs of all abilities.
- There is an excellent learning environment in lessons. Pupils know the routines and expectations of the teachers and respond well to the learning activities.
- Pupils are set activities that are challenging. Particularly effective work was seen in the use and evaluation of historical sources. Teachers have realistically high expectations of all pupils.
- Time is efficiently used and activities are well paced. Teachers regularly make appropriate whole class teaching points to inject pace to the learning.
- Additional adults support relevant pupils constructively. They know the needs of the pupils well and help them to make even better progress.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is generally satisfactory.

- The school offers a broad curriculum at both key stages and there are plans for greater coverage of local history in Key Stage 2. However, there is some imbalance in Key Stage 2, for example the school offers a study of Victorian Britain as well as an in-depth study of the Second World War.
- There is good planning and progression in the teaching and learning of historical skills. The use of information and communication technology is soundly embedded across both key stages.
- The curriculum is enhanced by visits to a good range of historical places, including the local Fitzwilliam Museum, Ely Museum, The Scott Polar Institute, the Whipple Museum of the History of Science and Kettles Yard. In addition, the school regularly invites visitors to teach about aspects of history, including parents, Cambridge Junior Explorers and Aesop's Touring Theatre.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of history are satisfactory.

- The subject leader has undertaken the role for just a few months and she works part-time. In that time, she has reviewed the curriculum and is taking appropriate action to make it more balanced.
- She has a clear view of how to develop the subject. She has attended relevant recent training and led staff meetings on the subject. She has a good understanding of strengths and weaknesses in the subject through, for example, interviews with staff and the scrutiny of relevant documentation. However, she has not yet been able to observe any history lessons or to undertake a scrutiny of pupils' work in the subject.

Subject issue: the development of independent learning in history

The promotion of independent learning is good with outstanding features.

- Lessons are characterised by excellent relationships which enable pupils to work in a supportive environment.
- Pupils work well individually and in small groups. They sustain their concentration on the tasks set and they enjoy learning history.
- Some excellent independent work was seen when pupils were evaluating historical sources by themselves and when they were working on the lives of poor children in Victorian Britain. Pupils were keen to undertake the research individually or in small groups.

Subject issue: the contribution of history to community cohesion

The subject's contribution to community cohesion is good.

- History makes a strong contribution to developing pupils' awareness of the community around them. Pupils have a good understanding of the diverse communities in and around Cambridge through the school's work on local history.
- Pupils are taught from an early age of Britain's cultural and ethnic heritage through the study of, for example, Olaudah Equiano and slavery. This work is further enhanced into a study of the migration of peoples over the centuries.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that the curriculum is better balanced, especially at Key Stage 2
- ensuring that the subject leader is given enough time to help her monitor and evaluate history across the school.

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

Champak Chauhan
Her Majesty's Inspector