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Mr V Wilkinson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Wilkinson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 23 June 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 promotion of independent learning in history and on the subject's contribution to community cohesion.

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 you, staff and pupils, a scrutiny of relevant documentation, an analysis of pupils' work and the observation of four 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 over time. Pupils in Year 2, for example, can accurately sequence the story of the Gunpowder Plot, while those in Year 4 are developing well their understanding of aspects of Ancient Egypt.
- In Year 6, pupils have good understanding of changes during Tudor times and some have undertaken good in-depth research on Tudor clothing and on daily life for the poor. The higher attainers write extensively. Pupils are making good progress in learning about the Beatles and the life of John Lennon in particular.

- Although pupils are making good progress in developing their knowledge and understanding, their broader historical skills, for example of enquiry and interpretation, are underdeveloped.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are excellent. They are friendly and well motivated. They sustain their concentration on the tasks set and most are interested in learning about the past. They work well with each other and with the adults.

Quality of teaching and learning of history

The quality of teaching and learning is good and, occasionally, has outstanding features.

- Lessons are planned in detail and identify the needs of the various abilities. Appropriate activities are then organised, and pupils of all abilities and backgrounds make good progress.
- There is a good learning environment in lessons. Routines and expectations are well known and understood by the pupils. They settle down quickly and respond well. Teachers and teaching assistants work well together.
- Teachers use the interactive whiteboard competently. They use it to stimulate discussion, to reinforce particular points and use it for showing video clips.
- Teachers use good questioning skills to extend the pupils' understanding. They offer good feedback to individuals and to the class.
- The open-ended nature of some tasks, which enable in-depth research, have led to some excellent challenge for the pupils. Their knowledge and understanding have been extended.
- The activities set are well paced and time is efficiently used. Some excellent use was made of inviting visitors to talk about their childhood in the 1940s, especially as evacuees.
- Pupils' work is regularly marked. Constructive feedback is offered to the pupils who said they valued the comments made because they helped them to improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is broad and it meets requirements. It is undergoing a period of profound change where greater emphasis is being placed on cross-curricular links and the development of creativity. Some good links have been established with other subjects, for example English, geography and music. It is important, however, that the integrity of the subject is maintained within this approach.
- The curriculum is enhanced well by the use of outside speakers and through undertaking work in local history. However, visits to other places of historical interest are limited.

Leadership and management of history

The leadership and management of history are good.

- The permanent subject leader has been on long term illness but her role has been ably taken over by a senior leader.
- Both the subject leaders have driven forward developments in history well. There is a thorough process within the school for self evaluation. This includes evaluating the pupils' work, assessing standards and holding discussions with other staff. These approaches have led to an accurate analysis of strengths and weaknesses.
- There is a detailed improvement plan for the subject and appropriate priorities have been identified. The use of more artefacts and the greater use of local historical sites and organisation have been rightly identified as areas for further development.

Subject issue: the promotion of independent learning

The promotion of pupils' independent learning is good and, occasionally, has outstanding features.

- There is a good ethos within the school which promotes independent learning for all pupils. This philosophy is strongly embedded in the teachers' routine planning and in lessons.
- Pupils undertake a wide range of independent work in history. They research using computers and textbooks, they bring in artefacts and ask appropriate questions about them, and they are very keen to talk with visitors.
- Pupils work well on their own, in pairs and in small groups. Many were highly motivated in learning more about evacuees during the Second World War, and about the Beatles and the life of John Lennon.

Subject issue: the subject's contribution to community cohesion

The subject's contribution to community cohesion is satisfactory.

- The subject makes good use of local groups and amenities to promote community cohesion. The school works closely with Whitwell Historical Society, Creswell Crags (an international heritage site) and Whitwell Wood Group, who have responsibility for special historical sites. Visitors regularly come into school to talk about local history.
- The school promotes pupils' global understanding through the study of relevant topics. However, the preparation of pupils for life in a culturally and ethnically diverse society is limited and the school is aware of this.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that pupils develop a full range of historical skills, including those of enquiry and interpretation

- ensuring that pupils visit a wider range of historical places to enrich their learning experiences.

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