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Dear Miss Whymark

Ofsted survey inspection programme – history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 23 September 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 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 satisfactory.

Achievement in history

Achievement is satisfactory.

- Pupils show sound knowledge of the topics they are studying. They talked knowledgeably about the Egyptians and about life in Tudor times. Older and more able pupils often show detailed knowledge about their recent history topics and talk confidently about what they have learnt.

- Pupils' grasp of historical skills is improving rapidly with the school's focus on skill development, although the school is aware it needs to set skills work securely in history-focused contexts.
- The standard of pupils' work in history benefits from links which teachers make with literacy, including opportunities to promote speaking and listening. Pupils' skills in writing are being developed generally in the school, but in history this has yet to show an impact on the quality of extended writing, which remains satisfactory.
- Pupils' personal development in history is good. They enjoy the subject and are eager learners. Their behaviour is usually very good.
- Pupils generally show good attitudes to learning and work well in groups as well as on their own.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Teaching is often good in lessons, but not all groups of pupils make the progress they should over time. Pupils learn best when lessons engage their interest and have appropriate levels of challenge. Pupils said how much they enjoyed practical lessons.
- Teachers are enthusiastic about history and this in turn helps to promote pupils' enthusiasm. However, their understanding of how skill work in history can be accurately assessed, so that all pupils are provided with appropriately challenging tasks to meet their needs, has only recently been enhanced, and has had little time to improve attainment and progress.
- Teachers provide varied activities for pupils. The best provide opportunities for pupils to explore historical evidence, sometimes as part of an extended research project ('You are On Your Own' activities), and consolidate their communication skills. In one lesson, pupils were asked to piece together parts of photographs of Greek soldiers and, when compiled, to compare them so that they could identify what make Greek soldiers so successful. Pupils enjoyed this and learned a lot about evidence gathering and using it. However, work is often insufficiently adjusted to meet the needs and abilities of different pupils, especially the more able.
- Marking is too variable. The best identifies the strengths in pupils' work and how they might improve, but some is cursory or focuses mainly on correcting spellings.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- The school has developed a skills-focused curriculum and history topics are taught within that framework. This has had the positive effect of promoting more active approaches to learning, but planning still lacks clarity about progression in skills, as well as pupils' understanding of topics.
- Links are made with literacy, numeracy and ICT, but these are currently at the initiative of individual teachers. The school has identified that a structured overview would be beneficial to pupils' learning in history.
- The school provides a wide range of opportunities for visits and visitors to enrich its provision for history and pupils say how much they enjoy them.
- There are increasing opportunities for pupils to study other areas of the world and different cultures, and there are growing links with schools in other countries. From the perspective of contributing to pupils' understanding of community cohesion, however, such opportunities remain limited.

Leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory.

- The subject coordinator is also the coordinator for geography, a subject which she has more expertise in teaching. However, she is enthusiastic about history and is learning quickly about how to plan and embed new practices, especially in relation to skill work. She is supported well by the deputy headteacher who has more experience in history.
- The coordinator has acknowledged that the system of lesson observations in history is limited.
- The subject self-evaluation clearly identifies appropriate priorities for history. These include supporting teachers in setting more challenging tasks and targets for more able pupils. Some priorities, notably monitoring pupils' progress in skill work, have begun to be addressed only recently.

Subject issue: the contribution of history to community cohesion

The contribution of history to community cohesion is satisfactory.

- Pupils have some understanding of their locality through local history activities and joint history-geography activities designed to enable pupils to find out about Durrington. Knowledge of national developments remains limited but knowledge of world aspects is good.

- There is little overt planning for addressing community cohesion issues in history, but a number of discrete and currently unconnected activities do enable pupils to begin to value diversity and understand shared values.
- All pupils are developing their critical thinking skills across a range of subject contexts in history, and thus are beginning to think about prejudice and the values of other cultures, though this remains limited.

Subject issue: the development of independent learning in history

The development of independent learning in history is good.

- Pupils are frequently asked to investigate aspects of topics on their own and then share them with the whole class. Pupils said they enjoyed these tasks, particularly because they were invited by teachers to follow their own interests.
- This practice is planned well in subject documentation and it is clear from independent work undertaken by pupils in the past that they make good progress in developing their history skills at these times.
- A good range of resources is available to support pupils in their individual investigations.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that history skill development is soundly grounded in appropriate historical contexts and topics, with clear guidance on how teachers can assess and monitor pupils' progress
- providing more opportunities for pupils, especially in Years 5 and 6, to develop their extended writing skills
- planning a cycle of lesson observations so that the history coordinator can monitor the quality of teaching and learning more rigorously.

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