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Dear Mrs Nettey

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: history

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 19 November 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 included interviews with staff and pupils, a scrutiny of relevant documentation, an analysis of pupils' work and the observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

Achievement in history

Achievement in history is good.

- Pupils make good progress in history and standards of attainment are above average. Pupils demonstrate excellent knowledge and understanding of important historical events and people. For example, Year 2 pupils are able to talk confidently about the lives of historical figures such as Florence Nightingale and Isambard Kingdom Brunel.
- The school's work to improve standards in pupils' writing has had a clear impact on the quality of pupils' written work in history. For example, pupils

in Year 6 have produced good-quality written work on the impact of technological changes since 1948.

- Chronological understanding is also developed well. Older pupils are able to confidently place different historical periods into the correct chronological order. Effective teaching in the Reception classes ensures that younger children develop a good understanding of concepts relating to the passage of time.
- Pupils are less confident in their deployment of other historical skills. While all are able to find out information from historical sources, and many are able to make inferences about the past from different types of evidence, pupils are less secure in their understanding of historical interpretations and in their ability to assess the value of historical evidence.
- History makes a tremendous contribution to pupils' personal development. Pupils enjoy studying history and behave well in lessons.
- History makes a very significant contribution to pupils' excellent spiritual and moral development, through the study of sensitive issues such as slavery and the Holocaust.

Quality of teaching in history

The quality of teaching is good.

- Pupils enjoy history because lessons are planned thoroughly and are delivered with enthusiasm by their teachers. Pupils particularly enjoy opportunities to conduct research or to find out about the past through role-play. One pupil said, 'I love history because the teachers make it fun'.
- In some lessons, pupils are given good opportunities to use real historical evidence. For example, in a Year 3 lesson, pupils investigated the impact of the Blitz on the local area by studying newspaper reports and old photographs.
- Learning activities are planned to meet the needs of pupils of all abilities and good support is given to pupils who need extra help to develop their literacy skills. Occasionally, pupils are expected to sit and listen to the teacher for too long. This can result in some pupils losing concentration.
- Though teachers have a clear understanding of what pupils should learn by the end of the lesson, learning goals are not always focused sufficiently on history-specific skills.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is supported by outstanding provision for enrichment in history, including an excellent range of visits for all year groups. Residential visits to Ironbridge and to the battlefields of the First World War in France make a particularly strong contribution to pupils' knowledge and understanding of history and to their personal development.

- Pupils' historical understanding is also enhanced through history theme days. Year 3 pupils greatly enjoyed the chance to create a Roman Museum for other pupils and parents to visit. Their knowledge of Ancient Rome was enhanced by opportunities to make Roman artefacts, cook Roman meals and study the Roman justice system.
- The curriculum offers good coverage of local, British, European and World history and has been adapted to meet pupils' particular needs and interests. For example, prominence is given to Black History Month and the school's work in this area is held up as an example of good practice within the local authority.
- Clear strategies to plan for progression in pupils' understanding of key concepts and skills in history are not yet fully in place.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in history

The effectiveness of leadership and management is good.

- History is valued highly by school leaders and managers and is a key driver in improving pupils' skills across the curriculum, for example in literacy and information and communication technology (ICT). As you accurately note, 'history is woven into the very fabric of the school'.
- Leadership and management of history are strengthened by regular visits and evaluations by representatives from the governing body.
- Teachers are supported well by detailed schemes of work and good teaching resources and ideas.
- Self-evaluation is accurate, though not focused sufficiently on the effectiveness of provision in strengthening pupils' understanding of key historical concepts and skills. Expected standards of attainment in history are not always set out clearly enough in school documentation. This makes it hard for teachers to make an accurate judgement on pupils' progress in history.

Subject issue: the contribution of history to community cohesion

The contribution of history to community cohesion is outstanding.

- History makes a very significant contribution to pupils' understanding of the local, national and global community. Visitors from the local community make a marked contribution to pupils' understanding of sensitive issues such as the Holocaust, slavery and immigration to the British Isles. As a result, pupils have a rich appreciation of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity and the school is an extremely harmonious community. Pupils from a wide variety of backgrounds get on extremely well.

Subject issue: the development of independent learning in history

The development of independent learning in history is good.

- Pupils benefit from extensive opportunities to conduct personal research, particularly using the internet. This has enabled them to work independently in finding out about topics such as the Ancient Olympics.
- Pupils are also given opportunities to develop their note-taking skills through, for example, their investigations into the causes of the Second World War.
- Planning for independent learning is not yet clearly set out in departmental documentation and sometimes too much teacher-talk inhibits pupils' ability to take the initiative in their learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- devising more rigorous strategies to plan for progression in pupils' understanding of key historical concepts and skills.

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

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector