

1. INTRODUCTION

The report is based on evidence from inspections of history between **April 2007** and **March 2010** in 83 primary schools and 83 secondary schools. Part A of the report evaluates standards and achievement in history, and the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning, curriculum provision and the quality of leadership and management in the schools visited. Part B discusses some key issues in history teaching in some detail. It considers the extent to which the subject is in danger of becoming marginalised and losing its integrity in many of the schools visited, particularly in Key Stage 3¹. The other issues discussed are: using information and communication technology (ICT) to promote achievement in history; ensuring the best learning in history; and history and young people's social responsibility.

The report builds on Ofsted's 2007 report, *History in the balance*. [See DSS Summary: DSS 07/08 05].

2. KEY FINDINGS

- In the schools visited history was generally a **popular and successful subject**, which many pupils enjoyed. Achievement was good or outstanding in 63 of the 83 primary schools and 59 of the 83 secondary schools visited. It was inadequate in only two schools.
- Although pupils in **primary** schools generally had good knowledge of particular topics and episodes in history, their **chronological understanding** and their ability to make links across the knowledge they had gained were weaker.
- History teaching was good or better overall in more than three quarters of the primary schools visited. However, teachers found it difficult to establish a clear **mental map of the past** for pupils. In part, this was because they lacked expertise in the subject and also because the National Curriculum specifications treat topics in a disconnected way.
- In most of the primary schools visited, there was **not enough subject-specific expertise or professional development** to help teachers to be clearer about the standards expected in the subject and to improve their understanding of progression in historical thinking.
- In just under half of the 35 primary schools visited where the teaching of foundation subjects, including history, had become based on cross-curricular topics or themes, **planning for progression in developing historical knowledge and thinking was limited**.
- In most cases, **links between secondary schools and their local primary schools** were weak, so that expertise in the secondary schools was not exploited to support non-specialists in teaching history in the primary schools.
- History was successful in most of the **secondary** schools visited because it was **well taught**, notably in examination classes at GCSE and A level. The large majority of these history teachers were very well-qualified. In the large majority of the schools visited, the quality of the provision also reflected the **strong leadership** of the history departments.
- **Attainment** in history in the secondary schools visited was **high** and has continued to rise, particularly at GCSE and A level where results compare favourably with other subjects.²
- Patterns of entry for **GCSE** history varied considerably between different types of school: **only 30% of students in maintained schools took the subject in 2010** compared with 48% in independent schools. In academies, the proportion was lower still at 20%.
- While most work in the sixth forms visited was well-resourced, in some schools an **over-dependence on set text books**, linked to specific AS and A-level specifications, did not prepare students well for the challenges of higher education.
- Overall, **achievement was weaker in Key Stage 3 than in Key Stage 4** because of a number of factors: more **non-specialist teaching**; reductions in the **time that schools allocated** to history; and

¹ The report says: 'In England, history is currently not compulsory for students beyond the age of 14 and those in schools offering a two-year Key Stage 3 course can stop studying history at the age of 13. England is unique in Europe in this respect. In almost all the countries of the European Union, it is compulsory to study history in some form in school until at least the ages of 15 or 16'.

² GCSE, AS and A-level results in history are available at: www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/.

whole-school **curriculum changes in Key Stage 3** in an increasing number of schools. Nearly one in every three lessons observed at Key Stage 3 between 2007 and 2010 was at best satisfactory.

- The National Curriculum orders and programmes of study in Key Stage 3 have led to much high-quality teaching and learning in history. However, in one in five of the secondary schools visited, **curriculum changes**, such as the introduction of a two-year Key Stage 3 that allowed some students to **give up history before the age of 14**, and **thematic approaches** to the curriculum, were associated with teaching and learning that was no more than satisfactory.
- **The view that too little British history is taught in secondary schools in England is a myth.** Pupils in the schools visited studied a considerable amount of British history and knew a great deal about the particular topics covered. However, the large majority of the time was spent on English history rather than **wider British** history.
- Three years after Ofsted's previous report on history, teachers had responded positively to developing **independent learning** in history. The most effective schools used a **well-focused enquiry-based approach** to achieve this. In addition, more schools were incorporating **ICT** into history. However, its impact in accelerating gains in pupils' historical knowledge and understanding varied, particularly in the secondary schools visited.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

The **Department for Education** should:

- review the requirements for initial teacher education and the provision of subject-specific professional development opportunities nationally to support primary school teachers more effectively in their work on history;
- ensure that, as a result of the National Curriculum Review, pupils in primary schools experience history as a coherent subject which develops their knowledge, thinking and understanding, especially their chronological understanding, and that all students in secondary schools benefit from a significant amount of history to at least the age of 14.

Secondary schools should:

- ensure that the requirements of the National Curriculum in history are met in Key Stage 3;
- ensure that pupils have a greater understanding of the history of the interrelationships of the different countries which comprise the British Isles;
- ensure that technology is exploited to best effect in the teaching and learning of history;
- ensure that sixth form history students read widely in preparation for the demands of higher education.

Primary schools should:

- focus on developing pupils' secure understanding of chronology as well as improving their thinking and knowledge in history.

All schools should:

- develop formal and informal networks, clusters and federations to provide greater opportunities for teachers of history to work together on subject-specific training.

The full report can be viewed/downloaded at: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/> > click on Publications and Research heading > enter history for all in the Search field