

History in outstanding primary schools

<https://educationinspection.blog.gov.uk/2021/04/27/history-in-outstanding-primary-schools/>

Tim Jenner HMI, Ofsted's subject lead for history, talks about the findings from our history subject inspections.

Building blocks of progress

- some excellent examples of schools that had carefully considered the building blocks of progress in history, identifying knowledge that was essential to pupils' understanding of new material. Several schools paid lots of attention to building up pupils' knowledge of substantive concepts, such as empire, tax, trade and invasion.
- impressed with pupils' chronological knowledge and their 'mental timeline' of the past
- Support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) was strength in all of the schools

Areas for improvement

- knowledge was less secure in those schools where leaders and teachers had not identified the knowledge that was most important for pupils to learn and remember.
- Often, these schools did not assess pupils' knowledge of the history content they had learned and therefore were not able to ensure that all pupils were making progress in their knowledge of history.
- In some of these schools, not enough priority was given to pupils building their historical knowledge. Inspectors saw some lesson activities that were not well-designed to secure pupils' knowledge. These included anachronistic writing tasks, such as writing a newspaper report on the Viking invasions of England, and activities that distracted from the history content pupils needed to learn.
- historical concepts were poorly understood. Teaching sometimes focused on pupils making their own judgements about significance, rather than learning about how others have attributed significance to topics or events. Similarly, pupils were encouraged to 'come up with their own interpretations' about the past without enough knowledge to do so successfully, rather than learning about how and why historians construct different interpretations of the past.
- Teacher subject knowledge seemed to be an important factor in the quality of education in this area, but also across history in general. Schools that had support from subject-specialists – whether from school staff, a multi-academy trust or local authority, or through subject associations – often had higher-quality plans in place.