**The Assessor Angle: Leadership. What Are QM Assessors Looking For?**

As the HA Quality Marks’ second full year draws to a close and we begin to see a number of schools joining the QM community, we decided to have a chat with QM assessor Alun Morgan for some of his thoughts on the QM programme. Alun has worked in history education for over 35 years in a variety of roles including teacher, subject leader, deputy head, advisory teacher, adviser, primary ITT tutor and A Level examiner and senior moderator. He has led history training at local, regional, national and international levels with a focus on teaching and learning. In addition, he has worked as an Ofsted inspector and School Improvement Partner.

**Q: As a QM assessor, what are the key things you get from being involved in the programme?**

A: A key feature has been the professional discussions with colleagues in establishing and developing the Quality Mark in the first instance and the ongoing dialogue through our meetings. Secondly, the opportunity to work with good schools and departments to identify and recognise the best of practice in history teaching. It is so rewarding to have positive discussions with teachers and feed back to them about all of the good things we have seen on our assessment visits. Finally, the icing on the cake is to talk to pupils who have been enlivened by enthusiastic and engaging teachers who cannot wait to tell you about how good their teachers are. The opportunity to tell a teacher that their pupils think they are wonderful is such a pleasure.

**Q: Why do you feel the QM is valuable to schools?**

A: There are a range of reasons. Schools and teachers gaining recognition for the high quality work they do in history classrooms on a daily basis is an obvious benefit. For many schools and departments, they do not know how good they really are, and to have a professional dialogue with an independent assessor who can identify good and excellent practice within a national context is a valuable developmental opportunity.

In a number of cases the validation and recognition of good practice within history is the touchstone for taking this across the curriculum to support wider whole school improvement in other subjects.

The criteria help teachers to understand what high quality history teaching should look like and the process of gathering and organising an evidence base against the criteria is itself good professional development.

On a personal level, being the subject leader who has prepared for and led the school or department through the process should be seen as a positive asset for any future career development.

**Q: What do you look for in a QM school?**

A: First and foremost, the impact the teaching has on the pupils. Schools exist for the benefit of its pupils and to talk with pupils who are enthusiastic about history, tell you the things they have learnt and want to find out more gives real satisfaction.

An interpretation of the National Curriculum that takes the pupils’ needs into account. This could be a strong local slant or some innovative choice of content that resonates with staff and pupils at the school.

An approach to teaching that emphasises enquiry and the development of independence in pupils. Also teaching that integrates the skills, concepts and processes of history into the content that is taught in an increasingly challenging way through the school.

Enthusiastic and informed teachers who bring the subject to life for the pupils and also colleagues and who are committed to ongoing development.

Good leadership in both the subject and at senior level that allows the subject and teachers to develop, thrive and take risks in the classroom.

**Q: One of the QM criteria areas is Leadership. Can you tell us about some of the best examples of leadership that you’ve come across in primary QM schools you’ve visited and why these approaches worked so well?**

A: In an inner-city primary school that I visited, the subject leader provides excellent support for all staff and, in turn, is equally well-supported by senior leaders including the headteacher to the extent that the subject leader was on maternity leave for the assessment but the school was sufficiently well organised that they undertook the day without the subject leader and were very successful.

The key features underpinning this was that history has a high status throughout the school, recognised by the headteacher. The subject leader attended local network meetings and time was made available for feedback from these meetings to be shared with all staff as soon as possible after the meeting. In addition, if there was something specific to a particular year group, that was passed on to the relevant teacher much more quickly. This information came independently from the head-teacher and individual staff. There had been a thorough handover between the history coordinator and the person looking after the subject in her absence meaning that quality of provision did not suffer simply because of a change of personnel

All staff felt individually supported by the subject leader. The subject leader had provided outline progression guidance for staff so that there was clear evidence of planning for progression across the school covering the key skills, concepts and processes as well as the content. Individual staff had freedom to develop the content to suit their needs and more specifically the needs of the pupils. The school had high levels of EAL pupils, children with SEN and Roma families. Staff were unanimously of the view that it had encouraged them to be much more active and dynamic in their initial teaching approach. History was very active and linked positively to other subject areas such as design and technology to bring the subject to life. All staff and the senior leaders were acutely aware of the need to tailor the history curriculum to meet the learning needs of the children in the school.

Following every history element taught class teachers completed a short one side A4 evaluation sheet outlining what worked well, what could be improved and any ideas for future support. In some cases, this led to a short meeting between the member of staff and the subject leader and there were numerous examples of improvements that had been made as a result of this process.

The subject leader was providing clear leadership in the area of assessment. Practice was thoroughly embedded across the school to the extent that even supply teachers were providing focused, subject specific feedback to individual children. There was a very clear link from the planning which focused on skills, concepts and processes; individual lesson planning which had clear history learning objectives (often couched in the form of a question); staff feedback which focused information on the learning objective; and responses from children to the feedback, often with additional follow-up that was done at the start of the school day.

The leadership of the subject from the headteacher, through senior leaders, the subject leader and individual class teachers was crystal clear, well thought out and leading to pupils making significant gains as they moved through the school.

If you would like to know more about how you can become a history Quality Mark school, why not take a look at the wealth of information and case studies on the [HA website.](http://www.history.org.uk/primary/categories/quality-mark)