

Good practice in primary history: celebrating outstanding history teaching through the Quality Mark scheme

Bev Forrest and Mel Jones

This article aims to cover two separate but related aspects. Firstly, using the evidence of Quality Mark visits to primary schools, Bev Forrest identifies and explains some of the best practice observed on these visits. Secondly, Mel Jones focuses on one specific case study illustrating the type of primary history practice characteristic of the Quality Mark Gold Standard. The emphasis in this case study is on the quality of the subject leadership.

The History Quality Mark was introduced in 2016 following a successful pilot scheme. It was devised as a way to enable schools to gain recognition for excellence in the subject and to support the development of learning and teaching in history. Primary schools eagerly signed up for the scheme even more than secondary schools. These schools cover all sizes, include special schools and the independent sector, and can even be found abroad.

It is particularly inspiring to see just what can be done in some schools in challenging areas and also those with tight budgets when teachers including senior leaders recognize the value of embracing a project. These schools recognising the impact of the Mark are keen to sustain the progress they have made and some are now at the stage of renewing their status, sometimes at a higher level.

Recent research into the impact of the Mark demonstrates it taking place on a number of levels. The opportunity it provides for evaluation and development has had a marked influence on school improvement. Teaching in history across the school has been revitalized through preparation for the Mark and teachers talk about a renewed interest in the subject not just for them but for pupils too. The good work within history has also spread across the curriculum with many schools adopting the practices within the

Mark to support development in other subject areas. Subject leaders involved in the scheme reported increased levels of confidence and a positive impact on their career development with many moving into senior management posts following completion of the award.

One benefit of the Mark is the Historical Association (HA) getting a much clearer picture of what is happening in schools, not just in those areas of outstanding practice but also in those aspects where even the best schools are struggling. Previously the annual subject report from Ofsted would have fulfilled this role but this information has been sadly missing in recent times. The information provided through the Quality Mark enables the HA to target areas strategically for the development of training and resources. In this article we will be showcasing areas of good practice found in the Quality Mark schools in each of the criteria. It is hoped that by reading about these schools you too will be inspired to embark on the Quality Mark journey and reap the same rewards.

Teaching and learning

This is a broad area but at its heart is ensuring that teaching results in effective learning for all pupils. In the most successful schools assessed, the teachers were skilled at developing the pupils as historians and consequently pupils had a strong sense of exactly what is history and its value. In one school, Year 5 pupils recognised how their own experiences would become part of history as they discussed the departure from the EU and how this would have a dramatic impact on the future. They also discussed how we should learn from mistakes made in the past and how, in the topics studied, refugees and invasion had parallels with current events. Subject-specialist vocabulary was introduced at an early age and as a result they quickly began to use these terms with confidence and accuracy.

One of the children's favourite activities was the ancient Greek food tasting, which included pomegranates, honey, oil, bread and goats cheese.



At a time when teachers' creativity is once again often being stifled by innovations in some areas of the curriculum, it is refreshing to visit schools where teachers are prepared to be bold in their choices of approach. In one Year 2 lesson observed, the teacher started out the lesson in role as Orville Wright leading the pupils in a fast-paced whole-class activity recreating the awe and wonder of first flight before moving on to use film clips to support discussion followed by a range of small group activities. In these the pupils framed questions to pose to Wright, sequenced examples of different forms of flight and matched images and statements about development in flight. The pupils were provided with question starters to ensure they devised quality questions and within the sequencing activity the choice of images challenged their possible misconceptions. All pupils were engaged throughout the session and were provided with opportunities to communicate the depth of their knowledge and understanding.

Leadership

This has often been the strongest area in the schools visited. The subject leaders involved represented all stages of a teacher's career, including some in their first few years of teaching who considered the assessment process as an ideal way of improving the status of the subject in the school and through that their own position. Some had the benefit of a strong subject background having studied the subject at degree level, while others had not studied the subject beyond Year 9. Yet within this diversity what united them was their passion for the subject and a willingness to continue to develop their expertise while in the role. The impact



During a maths themed lesson, pupils made Icarus flyers then tested them to see which could fly the furthest.

was strongest where the passion of the subject leader was accompanied by a shared set of aspirations within the senior leadership team. Here are just two examples, taken from many, of the effectiveness of leadership: one where the leader is focusing on systems within the school, the other where the leader is at a stage where they can focus on sharing good practice beyond the school.

In one school the subject leader utilised a range of approaches to give her a strong overview of exactly what was happening in the school. These approaches included lesson observations, end-of-topic teacher audits, book scrutinies and reviews of pupil progress records. This enabled her to identify not only pockets of good practice to be shared but also areas of weakness where resources and training should be targeted. Within subsequent staff meetings and training days she was given time to share her findings and then provide input where weaknesses occurred particularly within assessment. Time was also taken to develop a common vision for teaching the subject to be embedded across the school. Common models of working were generated which teachers could then use, thus generating greater confidence. Where teachers needed further support, for example in planning the Maya topic, she was prepared to undertake team planning.

In one gold award school the subject leader identified a gap in training opportunities for teachers in the local area. Following the removal of levels within the National Curriculum, teachers were finding difficulty in identifying and tracking progression. With backing from her headteacher she formed an informal local cluster group to develop subject-leader confidence in this area and also to provide a forum for sharing other good practice. This step highlighted what was happening in her school and enhanced her own and the school's status in the region.

Curriculum

A review of the curriculum of successful schools demonstrates that there is no one fail-safe approach to teaching history. Some schools followed a topic approach with strong cross-curricular links, while others chose to teach the subject discretely. Yet what united these schools was how the staff had extracted the best from a variety of materials, including those from published schemes, to shape their curriculum and ensured that it matched the needs and interests of the pupils in their school.

In one school a topic on inventions provided a platform for celebrating the achievements of inventors representative of the diverse cultural backgrounds of the pupils within the school. This included the Polish inventor Casimir Zeglen whose work included the development of the bullet-proof vest. One school chose to study early Islamic civilisation in a

predominantly white school within a culturally diverse area. Another included a focus on Empire soldiers in its coverage of the First World War where many of the pupils' families had originally migrated from the Indian sub-continent. In some schools the pupils helped to shape the curriculum content particularly in Year 6. One group of pupils requested a fashion topic and another was able to select their own individual focus area in local history.

These schools also recognised that the National Curriculum was just a starting point for developing the subject and used imaginative ways to increase coverage. They realised this was particularly important for maintaining interest and progress in the subject in those periods when history was not formally taught. They were also flexible in their choices, so that when an anniversary or news item occurred they would use the opportunity to capture the children's interest. In one school Children in Need day provided the platform for looking at childhood over time. In another a series of themed First World War assemblies had been delivered. The use of history-themed days was also very effective in introducing areas beyond the content of the National Curriculum. The selection of texts within literacy also supported coverage of history. One school chose to include Treasure Island within a pirate theme and on another occasion studied Shakespeare's plays. Skills in such areas as questioning continued to be developed across other subjects.

Achievement

This has been found to be one of the most challenging areas for applicants. Establishing quality monitoring and tracking systems and using them effectively to impact on progress takes time. In the most successful schools insightful headteachers gave the subject leaders the necessary time out of class to develop this area. Time was also given for moderation as without a shared understanding of pupil development it was easy to identify incorrectly some groups as having

Enrichment is often the strongest aspect of the Quality Mark criteria in schools visited. At Corpus Christi School in Leeds the teachers are passionate about broadening the experiences of all the children and finding something where each child can excel. As part of this vision they have recently set up an Ancient Greek club attended by pupils in Year 5. The club is part of the Classics for All programme which is freely available to schools nationally. The pupils have loved finding out more about the topics they have studied in lessons as part of the Ancient Greek topic. They are also beginning to learn some of the language and look at the broader culture of the area.



The first Greek lesson began by completing an English to ancient Greek word match up. Pupils learnt that many English words have their roots in ancient Greek.

made little progress while in others progress may be inflated.

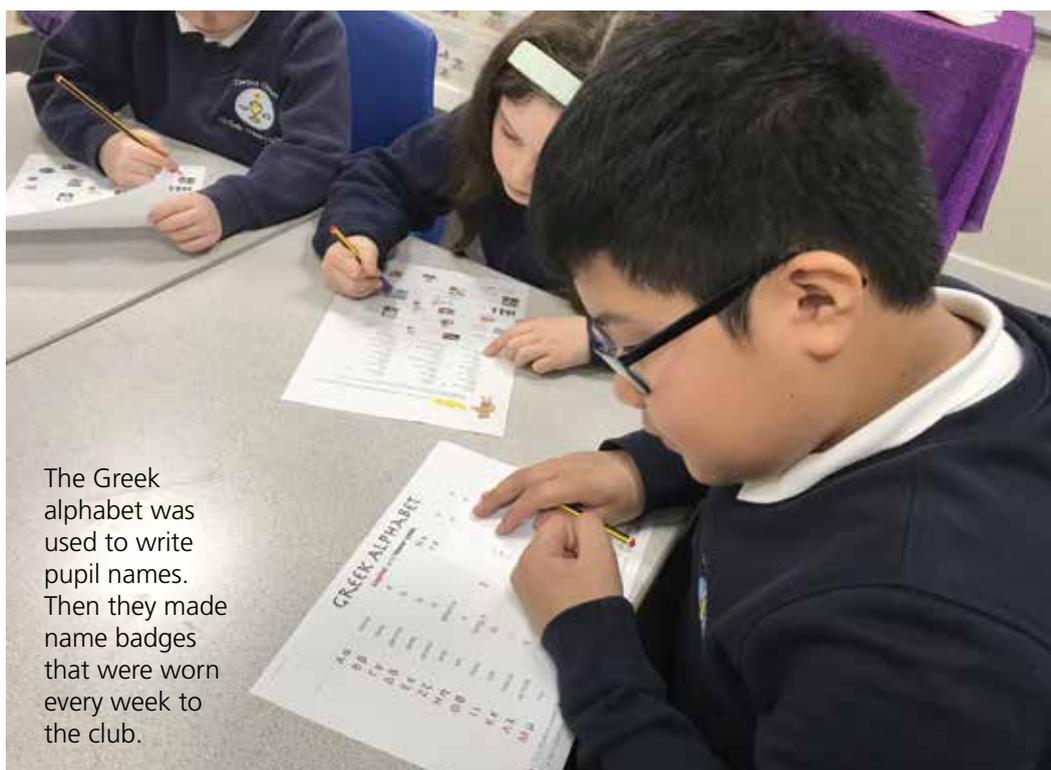
One subject leader had chosen to have a particular assessment focus on a skill, concept or knowledge per topic to support in depth understanding of progression. She had mapped these out over the key stage to ensure coverage.

In one school the high status of the subject ensured that achievement in history is celebrated. A history achievement board is prominently displayed and rewards can be gained for the subject. Pupils can choose to extend their learning in the subject through selecting history-focused homework.

Enrichment

In this area we are looking to find classroom environments that inspire pupils to learn and teachers seeking imaginative ways to enhance the pupils learning experiences beyond the classroom. These steps enrich not just the subject but the whole curriculum and school life. In many of the schools visited this was a particularly strong area and it was inspiring to see how teachers embraced this even in locations which appeared to offer few opportunities and when faced with very limited resources.

The inclusion of visits and visitors is undeniably an essential aspect of enriching pupils' experience and



The Greek alphabet was used to write pupil names. Then they made name badges that were worn every week to the club.

one seen in all the schools visited. Yet one school had taken this a step further by having a programme of visits not just for pupils but for parents too. Appreciating that many parents failed to travel beyond the confines of their town and knew little about its history or its links with national events, the school saw to it that parents were given the opportunity to visit nearby cities and also local sites. The school believed that by enriching the lives of the parents they would be more likely to create these experiences for their children. The school has found that parents are now

Case study

Burnley Brow Primary School, Oldham

Many history coordinators are thrown into their roles having received little or no training in either the teaching of history or the leadership of the subject. Leading the subject can be daunting, but, done well, it can raise standards, improve pupil motivation and can be a stepping stone to senior leadership roles in school.

So what does effective leadership of primary history look like? We asked Abbi Robinson Nelson from QM Gold Award school Burnley Brow Primary in Oldham.

Abbi has been in post for two and a half years and has been working hard to develop the subject through the Quality Mark process. An important element in the success is the excellent knowledge, not just in terms of history subject knowledge, but also in pedagogy. Another characteristic is the passion for enthusing and supporting colleagues. Added to the mix is the strong support of the senior leadership team who clearly understand the potential of history to enrich the lives of the pupils.

Abbi took time to develop her leadership of the subject, such as through team teaching in some year groups for example with NQTs. This support has been targeted in those areas requiring the most impact. Information from the scrutiny of a range of evidence including lesson observations, audits and reviews of pupils' work has helped to identify these focus areas.

Another important area of subject leadership is training. The support of senior leaders for Abbi's leadership has meant that she has been able to undertake a range of CPD opportunities. This is of limited value in itself but she has passed on knowledge and understanding gained from the CPD to the rest of the staff. Abbi has also been given time in staff meetings and training days to develop teaching in the subject across the school based upon the knowledge she has developed herself. This support for the dissemination of subject-based CPD is vital in the development of provision. At Burnley Brow, dissemination has resulted in a shared ethos about the teaching of the subject, with common principles being embedded throughout the school. This common approach benefits pupils in the application of models of good practice they can apply to any topic studied.

The views of pupils are actively sought to help develop provision, for example through the school council. In

response to requests from staff, Abbi delivered a session on the development of questioning skills. She is now developing networks beyond the school through cluster meetings where good practice is shared. Most recently she has offered to support a teacher at a local school preparing for their own Quality Mark assessment. Abbi reports being impressed and grateful for the resources provided by the Historical Association and directs the staff to appropriate materials to enhance the quality of their planning and teaching. Good subject leaders seem to know how to make the best of their HA membership.

The school is working hard to develop links with parents. Any feedback received for example via email communication, at coffee mornings etc., is acted upon. The work in history has been used as a model of good practice for other foundation subject leaders to follow and will provide a driver for overall school improvement in the future, so the headteacher at the school indicates. The trajectory that she has set for development of history in the school will be rolled out to other subjects.

Abbi sums up her challenges and how far she feels she has come:

When I initially volunteered for the role of leader of history I felt daunted and more than a little overwhelmed. I am passionate about history as a means of driving progression across all areas of the curriculum and have always had a great interest in all things historical, but had absolutely no experience in leading any subject, like many other history co-ordinators across our primary schools.

Coupled with this, individual foundation subjects had not been led separately in our school for some time, but rather maintained across two or more cohorts along with all the other curriculum subjects. This meant that I needed to rethink the approach to the teaching and monitoring of history and look at content and progression of skills and knowledge across the whole school. Luckily, leadership of core subjects in our school was very strong, and I decided to base my leadership of history upon these models. I performed an initial audit of the subject and found the HA QM criteria to be extremely helpful when identifying our areas of strength and points for improvement.

The next step was to establish a routine which would allow for a constant cycle of monitoring and reviewing

of teaching and learning within history. Again, I based this on the core subject model and use drop in lesson observations, planning scrutiny, environment walks, book scrutiny and children's voices. Initially this was a little time-consuming to set up, but now this cycle is in place I find that I need less time to perform these tasks, and they quickly and clearly highlight any areas for development or support.

I am also very lucky in that I work with a fantastic staff who are all willing to get on board with changes and have embraced fun learning opportunities whole-

heartedly. Leading the subject has been a fantastic experience both personally and professionally and has really given me the chance to stretch and develop my skills in different directions. It has also had a positive impact on children's interest in the subject and has strengthened the profile of history teaching across the school. I love it, and look forward to another year in the role!

Burnley Brow School attained the Gold Quality Mark in the summer of 2017.

more informed and confident about how to make the most out of any visits they do make and to go beyond the usual family and shopping visits by taking the children to museums and galleries. They also found that parents were more likely to contribute to local heritage projects and to engage with the school generally.

Most primary schools visited had inspiring displays both celebrating and supporting learning. Within the most successful schools the use of timelines was embraced not just in classrooms but also throughout the school. One school had a popular whole-school timeline displayed in the corridor that spanned the school year. On this timeline, classes added any special events, visits made or visitors to the school. For younger pupils this supported the development of their understanding of time, and for older pupils it served as a way of celebrating the things they had done while also exciting them about possible future experiences as they would move up the classes. In another area of the school a large-scale timeline featured topics studied by the different classes in history, and added to the display were significant events in the history of the school and the local area. This display powerfully reinforced pupils' understanding of big-picture history where they could see the links between local, national and international events and the range of events occurring at a particular time. Inside the classrooms were smaller timelines at child height featuring the topics studied over the year, introduced pupils not just to the sequence of events but also to interval and duration.

Next steps

This article is designed to showcase and celebrate all that is good in history teaching in our primary schools, yet assessments have identified there are still some areas where we need to focus our attention. The quality of feedback for pupils, particularly marking, usually needs improvement in even the best schools. Too often it is found to focus on literacy even when clear history objectives have been set. This results in

pupils having no direction on how to improve in the subject. Coupled with this is the realisation that many teachers can not provide next steps to pupils as they themselves are unclear what progression looks like.

With regard to the curriculum in Key Stage 2 the teaching of the post-1066 topic is often weak. Many schools still view this as an opportunity to retain pre-2014 topics such as the Home Front without any adaptation. Even when they are looking at a theme they are failing to grasp the need to link the content to that already taught in the pre-1066 units. Pupils at Key Stage 1 being taught a very narrow range of significant people and events often results in limited progress being made principally within the development of chronological understanding and a sense of period.

Both pupils and teachers are still failing to grasp the big picture of history and are continuing to look at topics and periods in isolation. Strengthening the use of timelines particularly parallel timelines would go some way to help to support children's understanding in this area.

If you would like to learn more about the Quality Mark process then take a look at the information on the HA website. Even if you feel you are not yet ready to take that first step towards the award there is still a great deal you can learn from the featured case studies of successful schools on how to improve learning and teaching in the subject in your own school.

Bev Forrest is a primary teacher trainer and educational consultant. She is chair of the HA's Primary History Committee and a History Quality Mark assessor.

Mel Jones is the CPD Officer for the Historical Association and oversees the Quality Mark award.