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Ms C Whetstone
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Whetstone

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 23 September 2010 to look at work in geography.

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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is satisfactory.

- By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils reach broadly average standards of attainment. They make satisfactory progress across the school but the quality of their learning in different year groups varies.
- Generally, pupils' understanding increases in depth and rigour as they move through the school. They have good knowledge of differences within countries such as Kenya, which they have studied, but have more limited knowledge of the key features of the United Kingdom and Europe.
- Pupils' investigative work and their problem-solving are relatively strong aspects of their skills development because they have good opportunities to undertake decision-making, such as in choosing the best locations for new developments.

- Pupils use their studies in the local area well to help them understand its distinctive features, how it is similar to and different from other places and why they like living in New Mills.
- Although pupils' attitudes to learning are good overall, particularly when working collaboratively in the school grounds, their understanding of what constitutes geography is more limited.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching in geography is satisfactory.

- Learning objectives are shared appropriately with pupils, and teachers structure learning well so that pupils know what they have to do. However, the nature and relevance of learning are not always made sufficiently clear to pupils.
- Teachers monitor pupils' progress adequately through the use of open-ended questions. However, the questions are not always sufficiently well-targeted to show what individual pupils know, understand and can do.
- Teachers use a varied range of teaching and learning strategies that give apt consideration to different pupils' learning preferences in their lessons.
- Relevant and topical resources, including the use of information and communication technology are used well to support pupils' learning.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- The recently developed thematic approach to the curriculum ensures that statutory requirements for geography are met. However, the curriculum is not yet well balanced, with some areas of geography being overly emphasised at the expense of others and there is also disparity across year groups.
- Sustainability at local and global scales is a strong feature of the curriculum but the concepts of space, scale and interdependence are less well developed through teachers' planning.
- The curriculum is planned to ensure strong links to pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. The school has rightly identified the need for further opportunities to support pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.
- The curriculum contains good opportunities for fieldwork in the school grounds, locally and further afield. This makes a good contribution to pupils' enjoyment of geography but fieldwork skills are not being developed in a systematic way.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The overall effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is inadequate.

- Leaders have appropriately identified a few relevant aspects for improvement, such as continued curriculum adaptation and the enhanced use of assessment. They are aware of the need to evaluate and develop geography more rigorously. There is, currently, satisfactory capacity for improvement.
- The monitoring of the effectiveness of geography has not been robust. It does not draw sufficiently on the analysis of pupils' work, teachers' planning, lesson observations and pupils' views to inform the school about the strengths and weaknesses in terms of provision or pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding.
- There is no subject development plan and most staff lack a clear vision of how to promote and improve the subject.
- Staff's professional development needs have not been analysed and links with subject associations have not been used.
- Staffing and resourcing are supportive of effective work in geography. Pupils have access to excellent resources in the school grounds and good information and communication technology. The quality of the outdoor environment is a particular strength which pupils delight in and contribute to.
- Geography makes a strong contribution to the promotion of community cohesion through an emphasis on learning in the local context, links with a South African school and newly emerging links with a school in a contrasting area of Manchester.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving teachers' use of questioning to assess pupils' learning
- ensuring that the curriculum is well balanced and that it ensures the progressive development of skills and concepts
- developing the rigour of monitoring, evaluation and improvement planning
- evaluating staff's professional development needs and exploring the use of support and training provided by the subject associations.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop geography in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Sonya Williamson
Her Majesty's Inspector