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Mrs G Lipscombe
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Lipscombe

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 22 November 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: discussions with staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of three lessons and an assembly.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory overall.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is satisfactory overall.

- From low starting points, in terms of their basic knowledge and understanding of the world, most pupils make good progress, in some aspects of geography, to reach standards by the age of 11 that are more broadly in line with age-related expectations.
- Pupils enjoy learning about different places and show real enthusiasm when talking about their work and experiences. They have a good understanding of the topics covered and recall an impressive amount of information about the different places that they have studied. However, there are evident gaps in pupils' wider knowledge and understanding of human and physical processes.

- Pupils have a sound understanding of their immediate environment, their neighbourhood and their own role in developing and maintaining them. Older pupils show interest in contemporary issues, for example through their regular work on stories in the news.
- When given opportunity to develop enquiry skills through research and data collection, pupils make good use of information and communication technology (ICT) to investigate and present their findings. However, their enquiry and data handling skills are generally underdeveloped.
- Geography makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development by promoting good understanding of people's cultural, social and religious differences. Pupils behave well and have positive attitudes to learning.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching in geography is satisfactory.

- The lessons observed provided useful links between geography and other areas of the curriculum, so that pupils learnt skills, such as directions and map interpretation, and also developed their locational knowledge. Teaching resources are sufficient to support pupils' learning and to develop their wider knowledge of the world.
- Pupils' work in books, folders, on display and demonstrated in their ICT presentations shows that they are given a suitable range and variety of activities to extend their learning. Some of these encourage them to undertake interesting independent inquiry.
- The pupils' very diverse backgrounds provide a rich geographical resource. Teachers occasionally use this wealth of first-hand information and experiences.
- Assessment in geography is weak. Teachers do not routinely assign levels to pupils' work, and do not have an overview of the levels at which pupils are working.
- Marking rarely makes reference to geographical criteria. It does not identify specifically what the pupils have done well or give clear guidance on what they need to do to improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Geography teaching is structured around a suitable range of topics, on a two-year cycle. Recent revisions, such as broadening units on ancient Egypt, Greece and South Africa, make topics interesting and relevant
- The curriculum has a suitable range of different scales of study and contexts, and presents more challenge as the pupils move up through the school. However, schemes of work have no foundation in specific skills, knowledge or understanding. The development of geographical skills and understanding tends to be incidental rather than systematic.

- There is no clear rationale for the geography curriculum as a whole. Key geographical concepts such as place, scale and interdependence, for example, are not clearly embedded in planning.
- The geography curriculum makes useful connections between subjects, such as history and French, but opportunities to develop and consolidate pupils' learning in literacy and numeracy are missed, particularly in Key Stage 2.
- Work in geography is supplemented very well by the school's wider curriculum. For example, the forest school, eco-school work, international week, residential experiences, partnerships and wider links with county schools and a school in South Africa all develop pupils' wider geographical perspective and understanding.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is inadequate.

- The development of foundation subjects has not been a priority for the school. Clear policies and procedures are in place to review geography provision, but self-evaluation is not sufficiently thorough to drive planned improvement.
- The role of the subject leader is clearly set out. Plans to review the subject are sensible, but the geography co-ordinator is new in post and has not yet been given time to develop her leadership responsibility.
- The subject leader is unaware of current developments in geography, and the school has had no recent access to subject-specific professional development.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- implement a framework of assessment criteria in geography so that:
 - specific skills, understanding and knowledge underpin each unit of work
 - lessons have a sharper focus on specific learning outcomes
 - pupils' progress and attainment in geography can be measured
- develop the role of the subject leader to:
 - review and evaluate subject provision and outcomes
 - fashion a more coherent and balanced geography curriculum that progressively develops the pupils' skills, understanding and knowledge.

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

Paul Brooker
Her Majesty's Inspector