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Mr M Stokes
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Stokes

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 11 October 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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is good.

- Children enter school with skills and knowledge that are well below those expected. Particular weaknesses exist in speaking, listening and writing. Good emphasis is placed on developing these aspects throughout the school, but particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage. For example, the theme of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* helps to develop children's language skills and their knowledge and understanding of different places through a wide range of interesting practical activities.
- Children make good progress in developing their skills and understanding in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Despite this, they enter Year 1 with attainment that is below average.
- Pupils continue to make good progress so that by Year 6 they attain standards that are broadly in line with national expectations. However,

fewer pupils achieve at the higher levels because work does not always extend the more able pupils.

- A good emphasis is placed on developing geographical vocabulary as well as observational skills. Pupils are able to use globes and atlases effectively. They can locate places on a map and recall previously learnt facts about places such as the Isle of Struay or about countries such as Mexico.
- Geography is frequently taught in other subjects such as English and history. Good links are made in their study of the Celts and Shackleton's explorations. Pupils understand what geography is and can articulate this clearly. They say that they enjoy their lessons enormously.
- Pupils behave well in lessons. They enjoy opportunities to work together collaboratively and practically such as making a map of where Goldilocks lived or locating the origins of different foods.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching in geography is good.

- Teachers motivate and engage pupils by planning and delivering interesting lessons. The revised scheme of work identifies key vocabulary and questions which help teachers plan with confidence. Learning tasks and outcomes are clearly specified and describe in detail the activities pupils will undertake.
- Good explanations combined with effective questioning ensure that lessons move at a good pace. Teachers have good geographical knowledge which ensures that pupils make good progress in all lessons.
- In the lessons observed, appropriate challenge was provided for pupils of different abilities and ages. However, scrutiny of work shows that the higher attaining pupils are routinely provided with activities or work that is similar to that of other pupils. Consequently, this does not always challenge their thinking.
- A wide variety of assessment strategies is in place. In lessons, the use of talking partners and peer assessment help pupils to understand how they are doing. Marking generally gives good guidance about what pupils need to do next to improve. However, this is not consistent between classes in the same year group or across the school.
- The school's assessment proformas effectively summarise pupils' attainment at the end of each unit. The focus on skills and knowledge helps to give teachers, the subject coordinator and senior leaders a good understanding of attainment and progress throughout the school. Increasingly, these data are being used to modify schemes of work or intervene at an early stage with those pupils in danger of falling behind.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is good.

- Curriculum planning and schemes of work ensure good coverage of the statutory requirements. The recent revision of the schemes of work has refreshed themes to make them more current and relevant for pupils.
- Units build sequentially which ensures that skills and knowledge develops progressively. Well-designed topics engage pupils' interest and motivate them to find out more about the subject. For example, pupils wanted to find out more information from different sources about Mexico as a result of their study of the country.
- Good links are made between different subjects. This provides a natural connection between areas of study and generates interest and enjoyment for pupils. For example, in a Year 6 literacy lesson, pupils' study of volcanoes was used effectively as a vehicle for increasing their confidence in using a range of connectives and conjunctions.
- Pupils make a satisfactory range of visits. However, fewer opportunities are taken in Years 5 and 6 to extend pupils' first-hand experience of the themes they are studying. Pupils have a good understanding of environmental issues following their visits to Spinney Hill Park, Cropston and Snibston.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- The subject leader has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the subject. A wide range of monitoring and evaluation has included scrutinising planning and work as well as discussion with pupils. Outcomes have been used to construct an appropriate plan of action for further improvement.
- Work on revising the schemes of work and developing the associated assessment strategies are of good quality. These are providing teachers with effective tools to plan, deliver and evaluate the quality of the work.
- Community cohesion work is good. Effective links with different types of schools in the city and the county, coupled with links in India, provide pupils with a good understanding of different types of communities in the United Kingdom and the world.
- A suitable range of resources is available and replenished on a regular basis. The subject leader has a good grasp of the issues affecting the subject and has led recent developments successfully. However, opportunities to use the support and resources available from subject associations have not been taken.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- extending the higher attaining pupils further by providing tasks and activities that are more challenging and routinely test their thinking
- building on the good quality first-hand experiences established in Years 5 and 6 to further develop pupils' fieldwork skills

- using the support and resources available from subject associations to provide staff development opportunities for the subject leader.

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 Weston
Her Majesty's Inspector