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Mrs M Kemp
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Kemp

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 27 January 2011 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 two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is generally good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is good overall.

- Most pupils make at least satisfactory and sometimes excellent progress as they move through the school. However, outcomes can be variable with, on occasions, outstanding work being produced while, at other times, the quality is less evident.
- Mapping skills and locational knowledge are often better developed than geographical understanding and fieldwork skills.
- In the lower school, pupils develop good observational skills and are helped to become aware of the environment around them through frequent outdoor experiences, focused use of Barnaby Bear stories and exposure to outside visitors, especially from partner schools in the United Kingdom and abroad.
- At Key Stage 2, when the focus on geography is clear, such as the topic on mountain environments, the learning can be excellent and informed.

However, when geography only provides a context for learning in other subjects, geographical learning often becomes superficial.

- The strong focus on international linking, through Comenius as well as in support of charities such as Fair Trade, develops pupils' knowledge of a wide range of locations around the world. Older, and especially the more able pupils, have very good locational knowledge recognising, for example, that Calgary is in Alberta, Canada; Tanzania is in East Africa; and that Queenstown is located on South Island, New Zealand.
- Pupils enjoy learning about the world around them; they are enthusiastic and respond well to challenging tasks set. Research skills, using a range of resources including the internet and atlases, are developed well.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching in geography is good overall.

- Good and outstanding teaching of geography were observed. When the geographical focus is clear, work is planned well and resources are appropriate, good teaching leads to good learning in the subject.
- The lack of quality resources prevents teachers from making best use of their talents when covering some topics and outcomes for pupils can be more fragmented and superficial.
- When teaching is good, effective use is made of information and communication technology in lessons to stimulate pupils' interest through the use of a range of visual images. Clarity of exposition also ensures that pupils understand what they must do to access and complete the tasks set.
- Themed homework tasks are used well to engage pupils in their learning and to develop research and writing skills, in particular. The potential for learning geography is not always fully exploited through this work. For example, when writing about global habitats the focus is often strongly placed on the plant or animal species rather than on the physical limitations of the environment.
- Assessment procedures are at an early stage of development. Teachers have a general overview of how pupils are progressing in their learning but their evidence for this is less secure.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- The clear structure to the thematic curriculum potentially provides numerous opportunities for pupils to learn geography. Unfortunately, at times, geography provides a context for learning in other subjects and opportunities are not fully explored.
- Although coverage is broad, the progressive development of key geographical themes, such as understanding places and physical and human processes in greater depth, is less evident.

- The potential of fieldwork is underused. Pupils get frequent exposure to outside classroom experiences, however, the geography element of these is often limited to low-level awareness raising and observation rather than the gathering and analysis of data and information.
- Good use is made of outside visitors and international links to raise awareness of places around the world. However, the curriculum does not enable pupils to develop a deeper understanding of these places.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

Leadership and management in geography are effective overall.

- The level of geographical expertise within the school is good. This ensures that the profile of geography is evident around the school. Displays are of a high quality.
- The subject leader monitors the quality of provision on a regular basis through a variety of methods, including scrutiny of work and discussion with both pupils and colleagues. Currently, this is not sufficiently evaluative to support focused development in the subject.
- Resources to teach geography effectively are currently limited. Good use is made of a range of maps and atlases but resources to teach about places in depth are dated or of poor quality.
- Although teachers' subject knowledge is sound and sometimes good, the support and training provided by the subject associations has not been used in further developing the quality of provision.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the quality of the resources to better support teaching and provide depth to the curriculum, particularly the knowledge and understanding of places
- using the support and resources provided by the subject associations to improve provision
- ensuring that geography is a clearer part of the learning experienced by pupils outside the classroom.

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

Leszek Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector