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Mrs J Pickering
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Pickering

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 30 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: discussions with staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of five lessons and an assembly.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is satisfactory.

- In some respects the standard of pupils' work is above the levels expected for their age. Pupils demonstrate good geographical knowledge: they use terminology confidently; older pupils have well-developed locational knowledge and are able to accurately locate places at different scales; and Key Stage 2 pupils understand concepts such as scale, direction and the use of symbols in mapping.
- Pupils enjoy learning about places, both familiar and exotic, and make good progress in most geography lessons. Pupils of all ages recall well their recent work; older pupils remembered the physical characteristics of rainforests from last year and were able to apply their learning in science to geographical contexts.

- Progress over time is more broadly satisfactory because pupils' understanding of geographical patterns and processes and their acquisition of skills in geography is rather patchy.
- Pupils are encouraged to ask geographical questions and are occasionally given opportunities to develop enquiry skills through research, investigation and data collection. However, these skills are generally underdeveloped. Pupils tended to lack the knowledge or understanding to be able to express views about contemporary issues.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching in geography is good.

- The lessons observed were sharply focused and challenging, and enabled pupils to make good progress in most sessions. The best teaching was superbly planned and expertly directed so that all pupils could engage in the activity and develop a detailed grasp of locational decision-making.
- Pupils' enjoyment and enthusiasm contributed positively to their learning, particularly when they worked in pairs and small groups to make decisions and share their ideas.
- Teachers make good use of a range of stimulating resources to engage pupils' interest and develop their wider knowledge. Learning activities are structured well and planned carefully so that pupils can absorb locational information, work out answers for themselves and ask geographical questions, even while learning French!
- In general, teachers' questioning probes the pupils' understanding and encourages them to be inquisitive about the world around them. However, this is not always the case; some questioning is weak and limits what pupils can learn.
- Assessment in geography is sound. Pupils usefully assess their own progress, and the newly introduced assessment matrix gives teachers a clear understanding of how to gauge pupil progress and attainment in geography, and how to plan further work.
- Although teachers do not routinely assign levels to pupils' work, they have a broad overview of the levels at which pupils are working and are able to set tasks that are both suitably challenging and supported appropriately for different groups.
- Some marking is exemplary because it identifies specifically what pupils have done well and gives very clear guidance on how to improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The geography curriculum is sensibly structured and routinely reviewed. Recent revisions, based on a four-year rolling programme of themes that are common across the school, make topics more creative. The approach also has the potential to make a significant impact on raising standards

because geographical skills and understanding can be developed more progressively through collaborative topic planning.

- Pupils develop knowledge and understanding of places, both local and global, and cover a range of topics on the physical environment. Work in geography and history is interconnected nicely through topics, such as exploration in Tudor times.
- Teachers take opportunity to develop pupils' wider knowledge of the world; links with a school in Hillingdon provide a useful wider perspective for the pupils. Assemblies and lessons routinely use a wide range of resources such as maps and atlases to set the pupils' learning in a geographical context. The geography curriculum supports well the pupils' literacy and their wider personal development.
- Pupils have occasion to carry out geographical enquiry outside the classroom, notably on their residential experience at a local field studies centre. However, the approach to planning surveys is not sufficiently systematic, research and fieldwork into the schemes of work.
- There is some emphasis on how people affect the environment and how they are affected by it, but it is not clear how the revised curriculum sufficiently promotes pupils' understanding of wider geographical issues and topical global concerns.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is satisfactory.

- The geography coordinator manages the subject well and effectively oversees provision. Subject monitoring is based soundly on evaluations of teaching, planning, and pupils' work and from structured discussions with the pupils themselves. Development planning is systematic.
- The subject leader is aware of some current developments in geography, but the school has had no recent access to subject-specific professional development.
- Recent subject revisions are promising. The revised curriculum has the potential to improve outcomes for pupils with progression being planned more systematically through each topic.
- The 'ladder' approach to assessment is also a helpful innovation because it encourages teachers to focus more sharply on the development of specific skills and understanding when lesson planning and subsequently when marking pupils' work. This is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' learning and progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the detail and focus of the best teaching and assessment are more widely replicated
- developing the revised curriculum to ensure that geographical understanding as well as specific geographical skills, particularly enquiry

and fieldwork skills, are built progressively as the pupils move up through the school.

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