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Mr B Chalmers
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Chalmers

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 25 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: interviews with staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; learning walks around the school; observation of a 'success for all' literacy session and observation of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is good.

- Pupils make good progress from low starting points to attain standards in line with national expectations in geography. This is because of the challenging teaching, excellent relationships and the very meaningful approaches to geography used in the school.
- Pupils are very enthusiastic and say that they enjoy learning about geography. They say that they particularly enjoy visits out of school, memorable learning experiences and the way that teachers make their learning 'fun'.

- Behaviour in geography lessons is very good, reflecting teachers' high expectations. Pupils happily engage in high-quality, collaborative activities that help them to learn more about the world.
- Through their studies of geography, pupils develop effectively their own sense of identity, self-esteem and concern for other people and places. They demonstrate a good understanding of where places are and whether they are similar to or different from each other.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching in geography is outstanding.

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and understand what constitutes effective learning in geography.
- Teachers capture pupils' interest and enthusiasm. Excellent use is made of a range of highly appropriate resources, including information and communication technology, to stimulate learning. For example, in a Year 1 lesson pupils used a video they had made of traffic problems in the local area to tally different types of traffic and look at how existing road safety measures could be improved.
- Teaching assistants provide invaluable support to help pupils develop geographical skills, knowledge and understanding.
- Pupils are fully engaged and appropriately challenged in active learning activities both inside and outside the classroom. In a Year 3 lesson pupils investigated what happened to rainwater that fell on the school roof.
- Pupils are encouraged to ask, as well as to answer, geographical questions. Very good opportunities are provided for pupils to think, solve problems, look at real issues and confidently share their views and opinions with others.
- All of the geography teaching observed during the visit was either good or outstanding. Where the teaching was outstanding, the sequence of lessons and activities was planned extremely well to ensure progressive learning and the acquisition of skills and geographical vocabulary for pupils of differing abilities.
- Excellent links are made between the literacy 'success for all' programme and geographical topics. For example, higher achieving pupils in Years 5 and 6 explored the concept of cause and effect through their investigations and presentations on floods, earthquakes, volcanoes and other natural disasters.
- High-quality questioning by teachers involved all pupils and was used very effectively to check on pupils' developing understanding. Pupils' work is regularly and comprehensively marked by teachers who provide detailed advice on how to improve it further.

- The school is aware of the need to develop an assessment portfolio of samples of pupils' geographical work linked to National Curriculum levels to evidence pupils' attainment.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is outstanding.

- Curriculum planning ensures curriculum coverage and provides a highly relevant context for learning.
- Geographical topics are selected carefully and modified continually in the Early Years Foundation Stage and at Key Stages 1 and 2 to provide a firm foundation for the development of geographical knowledge, understanding and skills.
- The curriculum is very well tailored to meet the needs of pupils in this school community. It makes excellent use of the local environment to foster pupils' enthusiasm for learning through first-hand experience.
- A particular emphasis is also placed on valuing the cultural heritage of different groups of pupils within the school. For example, pupils in Year 2 undertake an in-depth study of life in Nigeria using a wide range of secondary sources and artefacts.
- There is a strong emphasis on geography on local, national and global scales, but the European dimension of the geography curriculum is currently underdeveloped.
- The curriculum is continually enhanced through the use of thematic days. This ensures that it remains flexible and responsive and that the pupils can participate in available opportunities to enrich and enhance their learning.
- Pupils make a positive contribution to improving their own environment through the work of the 'green team'.
- Very high-quality displays around the school celebrate the outstanding geography curriculum and pupils' growing knowledge and understanding of the world.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- The recently appointed subject leader has a clearly defined role in monitoring and evaluating the quality of geography and an enthusiasm for teaching the subject. She has audited the subject and demonstrates a good understanding of its strengths and areas for development.
- The subject leader works well with you and the deputy headteacher to ensure that geography has a prominent place in the school's curriculum and promotes community cohesion very effectively.

- Local agencies and networks are used extensively to develop geographical work, but the school has not yet used the support and resources available from subject associations.
- The school is continually striving to improve the quality of geography and demonstrates a good capacity to continue to improve its work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that pupils develop a greater knowledge and understanding of the geography of Europe and its diverse cultures
- developing a portfolio of samples of geographical work, annotated against National Curriculum levels, to provide detailed evidence of pupils' attainment
- 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

Angela Milner
Her Majesty's Inspector