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Mr I Henderson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Henderson

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 2 November 2010, accompanied by Christopher Keeler HMI, 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 you, your staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is inadequate.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is inadequate.

- Pupils receive a fragmented experience of geography which does not allow them to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding in the subject. As a result, in all classes, standards are below those expected nationally.
- Pupils have some reasonably developed skills in geography. For example, they are able to use an atlas index to locate places but they are less familiar with, and secure in, using more detailed maps.
- Pupils' basic 'core' geographical knowledge is weak, especially their locational knowledge of places. Their use of specialist geographical vocabulary is also limited. Understanding about places and geographical issues is fragmented and shallow.

- Fieldwork skills are underdeveloped because pupils get very limited opportunities to carry out practical enquiry outside the classroom. Even on the residential visit to the North Yorkshire coast, there was no real focus on geography other than observation of contrasting surroundings.
- Pupils' awareness of the need to lead sustainable lifestyles is better developed. They understand the need to recycle and the need to act responsibly in terms of reducing consumption and waste. However, much of this is obtained from their home experiences and other curriculum opportunities rather than through geography.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good. Most pupils are familiar with the well-established classroom procedures. They enjoy geography when it has a clear focus and is taught well, as in the observed lesson on fair trade. However, their understanding of what constitutes geography is, in many cases, confused and limited.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching of geography is inadequate, despite teachers' good generic teaching skills.

- Teachers observed had good generic teaching skills and a good lesson was seen during the visit. However, weaker practice was also evident. Although the teachers are good classroom practitioners, they do not teach geography consistently well.
- Investment in relevant resources to support teaching has been minimal and there has been no professional training to support the development of teachers' subject knowledge and geographical expertise. Teachers' ability to teach geographically is weak.
- Teachers' lack of subject expertise is evident from their low expectations. This is reflected in some of the tasks set, which often occupy pupils rather than extend their learning and understanding of geography. For example, when pupils are given free rein to investigate a country, they download a range of information and colour in a flag yet fail to understand what the country and life in that country are really like. Commercially produced worksheets are overused.
- Assessment is insecure. Teachers' views of how pupils are progressing are not based on sound procedures. Teachers also lack the specialist geographical knowledge to make well-informed judgements. The fragmented curriculum does not support good assessment procedures.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is inadequate.

- There is no cohesive teaching programme for geography. There is a broad overview of themes which teachers are expected to interpret. Planning is focused on shallow coverage of a topic rather than a consideration of how pupils' understanding is to be developed.

- The attempt to develop a thematic approach has resulted in a tendency to focus on skills rather than other geographical concepts, such as place or physical and human patterns and processes. Currently, the geography curriculum is disjointed – intermittent rather than interwoven into a cohesive teaching framework. There is a lack of clarity about what should and needs to be taught.
- Fieldwork is not identified clearly in the planning. Only very limited use has been made of the local environment to support learning at Key Stage 1. Opportunities to use the pupils' residential experience in Years 5 and 6 are limited and do not encourage enquiry in geography. Currently, fieldwork skills are not being developed in a systematic way.
- Currently, the school has not established any links with schools in contrasting localities, either in England or abroad, which can be used to support learning in geography and promote community cohesion.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is inadequate.

- Geography has been marginalised across the school and insufficient time and resources have been invested in developing and improving provision.
- Provision is not monitored or evaluated to ensure coverage and consistency of delivery in the classrooms. As a result, weaknesses and gaps in provision have not been identified or rectified.
- The lack of clear guidance and support, as well as the lack of resources to teach geography, leads many teachers to waste time and effort in searching for ideas on the internet, many of which may not be appropriate or relevant.
- There has been no staff development to develop teachers' subject expertise. Despite the school being a member, no use has been made of links or the training provided by the subject associations to improve provision in geography.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing a clear teaching programme for the subject so that teachers understand what has to be delivered and how this can be achieved to meet pupils' needs better
- ensuring that sufficient quality resources are available to support teaching and learning and enhance provision throughout the school
- making more effective use of the outdoor environment to develop fieldwork skills and to enhance learning in geography
- developing teachers' subject knowledge, confidence and expertise by making use of the support, guidance and training provided by the subject associations.

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