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Mrs P Snowdon
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Snowdon

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 18 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: interviews with nominated staff, a representative of the Governing Body and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is outstanding.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is outstanding.

- Pupils make exceptional progress in their work to achieve high standards. In the lessons observed, the quality of learning was consistently good and often outstanding.
- Older pupils demonstrate a remarkable geographical knowledge, both of the topics they have studied and of current issues. They discuss with confidence recent events in the news, such as the Queensland floods, and are able to express well-balanced opinions and venture explanations by making connections with their work in geography.
- Pupils' analytical skills are well developed. They can carry out increasingly complex geographical investigations, including their own independent research.

- Pupils enjoy geography. They develop curiosity in finding out about the world around them and show real enthusiasm for the subject. For example, in the topic on the Second World War, older pupils asked specifically to investigate the impact on their own locality.
- Pupils show independence and originality in thinking for themselves, making locational decisions and even take the initiative in choosing topics to study. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 debated animatedly, as Roman centurions, whether to site their new settlement in a defensive position or take advantage of other resources laid out across the school hall.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to cultural, moral and social issues. They develop a strong sense of responsibility for their local and global environment and empathy for people facing challenging circumstances.
- Pupils' excellent behaviour is a positive factor in their good learning and progress. They sustain their concentration, work well together and show real enthusiasm when volunteering answers or working independently.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching in geography is outstanding.

- Teachers inspire pupils by communicating their own enthusiasm for geography. Lessons are lively and imaginative, but also well structured and planned carefully so that learning is focused sharply and well paced.
- Work is skilfully directed and managed so that all pupils are able to engage in learning. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported very well because work is tailored very carefully for them and the guidance provided by additional adults is excellent.
- Teachers prepare interesting activities based on a wide range of stimulating resources, including maps, multimedia and information and communication technology (ICT), to engage the pupils' interest and develop their knowledge. The onus, however, is appropriately on the pupils to investigate, analyse and draw conclusions for themselves.
- Assessment is good. Marking is thorough and constructive, although it does not always identify precisely the geographical skills or understanding that can be improved.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is outstanding.

- The curriculum is designed skilfully to match the full range of pupils' needs and to promote creativity and progression in their learning. Key concepts are embedded clearly in planning so that the curriculum enables pupils to develop and consolidate geographical skills and build their wider knowledge and understanding of geographical concepts.
- The particularly good focus on developing pupils' locational knowledge and building their geographical vocabulary helps them to make connections between places and events.

- The school's website is an excellent resource for pupils and parents. Interactive maps, games and resources, including links to the news and weather, successfully encourage pupils to take an interest in their wider world.
- Good use is made of the outside environment so that pupils develop first-hand experience of locations beyond their immediate locality. They benefit from a wide range of visits, trips and activities, but opportunities for geographical fieldwork are sometimes missed. This is a key priority for the new subject leader to develop.
- Geography makes an excellent contribution to relevant cross-curricular themes and also to pupils' wider personal development.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- The interim subject leader has, within a short period of time, taken steps to effectively monitor and review provision. Staff share a common purpose and have good opportunities to share best practice.
- Subject reviews and improvement planning are suitably focused on strengthening provision and improving outcomes; self-evaluation is accurate and constructive.
- Strategies to raise standards have been successfully implemented in recent years, particularly through revisions, to make topics relevant and creative.
- Leaders are reasonably well-informed about subject developments, although staff have not recently benefitted from professional development specific to geography.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- strengthening the role and influence of the subject leader
- developing a wider range of fieldwork activities to give pupils clearer progression in developing their skills in geographical investigation.

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