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Mr V Chan
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Chan

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 1 March 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 staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is good.

- Pupils make good progress from a variety of starting points to attain standards above national expectations.
- Pupils acquire a wide range of knowledge and understanding about geography. They have a well-developed understanding of where places are located and make accurate use of a wide range of geographical vocabulary. For example, Year 2 pupils were able to use an atlas to identify each of the continents and select appropriate weather symbols for different locations.
- Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of their own locality and the other places they have studied. They have a detailed knowledge and understanding of physical geography through their work on landforms, natural disasters and extreme weather.

- Pupils understand the complexities of relationships between physical, human and environmental issues and that they are part of a local and global community.
- Pupils are enthusiastic and say they enjoy learning about geography. They particularly enjoy learning about the similarities and differences between countries and finding out why natural events, such as hurricanes, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes, occur.
- Behaviour in lessons is good. Pupils happily engage in good-quality learning activities that help them to understand more about topical issues and the world around them.

Quality of teaching in geography

The quality of teaching in geography is good.

- Teachers have relevant subject knowledge which they use well in planning and teaching the subject. Teachers plan carefully differentiated lessons which cater well for the needs of all groups of pupils. They make appropriate use of a range of teaching strategies to promote good learning across all aspects of the subject.
- Teachers capture pupils' interest and enthusiasm. Good use is made of the school environment, both inside and outside the classroom, and a range of highly appropriate multimedia resources, including information and communication technology (ICT), to stimulate learning. For example, in a Year 5 and 6 lesson, very good use was made of the 'Worldwide Telescope' website to look in detail at the Earth and its key geographical features.
- Teaching assistants provide appropriate support to help pupils develop geographical skills, knowledge and understanding. For example, in the Reception class a teaching assistant ably led children in an activity using maps, photographs and the school grounds to follow the journey of the gingerbread man and discover where he was hiding.
- Pupils are fully engaged and appropriately challenged in active learning activities. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to think, research and confidently share their views and opinions with others.
- All of the teaching observed was good. Lessons were well planned and structured to promote good progress in pupils' learning.
- Good-quality questioning by teachers involved all pupils and was used very effectively to check on their developing understanding.
- Teachers mark work regularly, although the quality of feedback provided to pupils to help them improve their work varies.
- 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 attainment and to measure the progress pupils make in their learning.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is good.

- Curriculum planning ensures coverage and provides a relevant context for learning.
- All groups of pupils have equal access to the curriculum through a well-designed two-yearly cycle of geographically focused topics and cross-curricular themes.
- The curriculum is well tailored to meet the needs of pupils in this school community and contributes well to their personal development.
- The curriculum is continually enhanced through the use of thematic days. For example, a recent whole-school European Day allowed all pupils to travel from the school hall, converted into an airport departure lounge, to different classrooms to experience life for a child of their own age in another European country.
- Appropriate links are made with other curriculum areas and good use is made of geography to develop pupils' skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT. However, the curriculum currently lacks a precise enough focus on the progressive development of pupils' geographical skills.
- Good-quality displays around the school celebrate the effective 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 subject leader has a clearly defined role in monitoring and evaluating the quality of geography and has an interest and enthusiasm for the subject.
- The school's good-quality policy has been recently reviewed and plans are in place to evaluate recent changes to the curriculum at the end of its first cycle in the summer term 2011.
- The subject leader is able to access available local authority in-service courses but the school has not as yet used the support and resources available from subject associations to provide updating opportunities for the subject leader.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and action planning is focused on continually enhancing provision. This means the school demonstrates a good capacity to continue to improve its work in the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing a portfolio of samples of geographical work, annotated against National Curriculum levels, to provide:
 - detailed evidence of pupils' attainment and progress

- good exemplars of marking and feedback which show pupils how to improve their work
- auditing the recent changes made to the curriculum to ensure that there is a precise focus on the progressive development of pupils' geographical skills
- 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