

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs R Horsley
Headteacher
Palterton Primary School
Back Lane
Palterton
Chesterfield
S44 6UN

Dear Mrs Horsley

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 21 September 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; and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory with some good features in teaching and the curriculum.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is satisfactory.

- Discussions with pupils and observations of lessons in each class show that pupils currently make satisfactory progress by the end of Key Stage 1 and good progress by the end Key Stage 2. This is because the rigour and depth of learning varies from class to class.
- In Key Stage 2, pupils experience well-planned topics with a clear geographical focus and engage in sequential learning activities designed to develop skills and build their knowledge and understanding of specific places. In the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, planning is less well focused on the precise and progressive learning activities pupils need to make good progress in their learning.

- The school does not currently have a system in place to ensure that it has an accurate and moderated view of geographical attainment by the end of each Key Stage. As subject leader, you have recognised the need to improve assessment as a whole-school priority and develop a moderated portfolio of pupils' work linked to age-related expectations.
- Inspection evidence shows that pupils demonstrate a good understanding about geography and the places they have studied by the end of Key Stage 2. They can use maps and air photographs well but there have been limited opportunities over the last two years for pupils to make use of these skills in the outdoor environment or to develop a range of fieldwork skills.
- Pupils enjoy their lessons and talk enthusiastically about their work. All were engaged in appropriate activities in the lessons observed

Quality of teaching in geography

The quality of teaching in geography is good overall.

- Teachers motivate and engage pupils and deliver interesting and relevant lessons. During the visit outstanding, good and satisfactory teaching was observed.
- In the best lessons, teachers use their subject knowledge, good explanations and effective questioning to ensure that lessons are practical, move at a good pace and that all pupils made good progress. High-quality questioning involves all pupils, and opportunities are provided for pupils to think, solve problems, look at real issues and confidently share their views and opinions. As a result they are able to ask, as well as answer, geographical questions well.
- Teaching assistants are deployed effectively to support pupils in all classes.
- The school has an appropriate range of geographical resources and good use is made of information and communication technology and multimedia resources in teaching and learning.
- A variety of assessment strategies is in place. In lessons, teachers constantly use questioning to check on pupils' understanding and pupils are involved in assessing their own learning. Summative assessment, in the form of 'I can statements', is undertaken at the end of each year but there is no evidence to show how accurate these teacher assessments are in relation to age-related expectations. Similarly, there is no evidence to indicate how well teachers' marking helps pupils to improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is good.

- The curriculum for each class is well designed around a two-yearly cycle of planned geographically focused units of work and complementary cross-curricular topics. It is continually reviewed with the introduction of new and imaginative topics such as 'From Hollywood to Bollywood'.

- Schemes of work ensure that curriculum coverage is broad and balanced and provide a relevant context for learning. There is a good emphasis on the study of localities at a range of scales from local to global and pupils have opportunities to study human, physical and environmental themes in great depth.
- The curriculum is matched to the range of pupils' needs and provides good opportunities for pupils to develop their enquiry, mapwork and communication skills. You have encouraged staff to make more effective use of the outdoor learning environment and provide pupils with more opportunities to engage in fieldwork this year.
- The curriculum is flexible and responsive to topical events. For example, Key Stage 2 pupils have investigated the impact of a proposed wind farm on the immediate locality and corridor displays and assemblies focus on geography in the news.
- High-quality classroom displays celebrate pupils' developing knowledge and understanding of the world by creating a real sense of the places they are studying and providing good opportunities for role play. This half term the Year 5 and 6 classroom has become an explorer ship enabling pupils to look out on a potential new colony and use their geographical knowledge and understanding to choose where they might locate their first settlement.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is currently satisfactory but there is good capacity to improve.

- As newly appointed headteacher and subject leader you have quickly and accurately established the strengths and weaknesses of current provision.
- A detailed subject action plan is in place. This provides opportunities for systematic monitoring and evaluation. There is also an appropriate emphasis on enhancing the quality of provision and accelerating the progress that pupils make in their learning.
- Resources have been reviewed and updated and the school is well stocked with globes, atlases, library books and resources linked to the topics studied.
- Plans are in place to join the subject association and establish links with a range of partners to enhance the quality of the curriculum and place a greater emphasis on outdoor learning and fieldwork.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- reviewing current provision to ensure that there is rigour and depth to learning in geography in each class
- making more effective use of the outdoor environment to enhance learning and develop pupils' fieldwork skills

- producing an annotated portfolio of samples of pupils' geographical work to provide:
 - moderated evidence of pupils' achievement in relation to age-related expectations in the subject
 - good exemplars of marking and feedback which show pupils how to improve their work
- monitoring the impact of the recently produced subject action plan on the quality of provision and the amount of progress pupils make in their learning.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop geography in the school.

As 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Angela Milner
Her Majesty's Inspector