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23 November 2011

Mrs P Baker  
Acting Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Baker

### **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 9 November 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 three lessons and a learning walk through the Early Years Foundation Stage unit.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

### **Achievement in geography**

Achievement in geography is good overall.

- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, pupils make overall satisfactory progress in terms of their general awareness of their locality and environment. Girls are more focused in their learning than the boys.
- By the end of Year 6, pupils have a good knowledge of where places are because of the very strong focus in the curriculum on using atlases and developing a wide range of mapping skills.
- However, the progress pupils make as they move up the school is less consistent because the curriculum lacks clear progression in the development of geographical knowledge, understanding and skills and, as a result, pupils progress in bursts. For example, mapping skills are very well developed in Year 1 with pupils able to use coordinates with a high

degree of accuracy, but this is not built on until the latter stages of Key Stage 2 where pupils learn to use more complex maps, including Ordnance Survey maps.

- Fieldwork skills are well developed as pupils progress through the school because there are frequent opportunities for outdoor learning opportunities, especially in the local area but also further afield.
- The discrete geography taught, particularly physical geography, encourages pupils to develop a very good geographical vocabulary. As a result, when studying rivers pupils are able to explain confidently what erosion is and can describe the physical features of rivers using terms such as estuary, meander and source. In Year 3, for example, pupils were able to confidently explain how a volcano erupts using technical language such as magma, crater and mantle accurately.
- Although India is studied in some depth, pupils' understanding of other places is more superficial so, although pupils have a good understanding of many aspects of geography, their understanding of the characteristics of a range of places is more limited.
- Pupils enjoy geography, especially when it is taught discretely, for example, when studying volcanoes or when it engages them creatively like the work on Pirate Island in Year 1. They work well collaboratively and behaviour in lessons reflected the very positive relationships which exist.

### **Quality of teaching in geography**

The quality of teaching in geography is good.

- The teachers have good generic teaching skills and the lessons observed were generally of a high quality. Teachers use the resources available to good effect but where materials are more dated or less suitable they have more difficulty in teaching geographically and sometimes compensate by overuse of worksheets.
- Although teachers are not subject specialists, they do explain key geographical concepts and use geographical vocabulary confidently with pupils. Geography is seen as being an important subject which supports the whole development of a child well.
- A wide range of strategies is used effectively to engage pupils in their learning. Group work is common and good use is made of 'talk partners' where pupils learn to share their ideas. However, there is less emphasis on geographical enquiry.
- Information and communication technology is used well to support learning. A range of multimedia resources, including maps, Google earth, photographs and video clips, engages pupils in their learning.
- Lessons observed showed that teachers use good questioning skills to ensure real engagement and practical activities to stimulate pupils, encouraging enthusiasm for the subject.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly but there is some variation across classes in terms of providing constructive feedback. A moderated portfolio of work

does provide a useful baseline against which to measure and monitor pupils' progress.

- Teaching assistants are generally deployed effectively to support pupils with specific learning needs or to focus on small group activities. However, at times they can be too passive during extended periods of teacher talk or during talk partner discussions.

### **Quality of the curriculum in geography**

The quality of the curriculum in geography is, currently, satisfactory.

- The curriculum is planned to ensure broad coverage of National Curriculum requirements but does not support progression effectively. This issue has been identified by the school and is in the process of being rectified.
- Some units of work are exemplary and provide real depth and challenge and motivate pupils so that they make really good progress. Other units are more dated and dull with pupils being occupied rather than challenged. There is an overuse of worksheets in some topics.
- Fieldwork opportunities are built into the teaching programme and pupils benefit from walks in the local area as well as day visits and residential visits to contrasting localities such as Horton Kirby. The range of data-collection techniques is more limited.
- There is a good balance between discrete geography and enrichment opportunities linked to specific themes including those linked to the environment and leading sustainable lifestyles. This broadens pupils' understanding of geography. Geography is also used well to provide a context to reinforce and support literacy.
- Currently, there are no developed links to schools in contrasting localities. The school has plans in place to formalise a partnership with a school abroad and integrate this opportunity into the taught curriculum.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography**

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- The recently appointed subject leader has a clear vision for the direction in which she wants the subject to move. There is good capacity for improvement.
- The monitoring of the subject is well established and supports accurate self-evaluation. The subject leader has identified strengths and weaknesses. A well-considered action plan is in place to provide a good framework for future improvement. This is a sound basis on which to develop the subject further.
- There is a strong focus planned on developing the curriculum to ensure clearer progression in pupils' learning, a more in-depth study of differing localities and looking at issues which impact on the lives of the pupils.

- The school is a member of a subject association but has not used this link to best effect in terms of providing training or improving resources.
- Resources currently available are satisfactory overall. The school is well stocked with maps, atlases and globes, but lacks the range and variety of resources to teach some units in sufficient depth.

**Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- reviewing the curriculum to ensure clearer progression and consistency in the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills, and especially in the more in-depth study of places
- updating and improving the quality of the resources to encourage teachers to develop greater confidence in teaching geographically
- embedding the prospective international links into the curriculum to support and enrich geographical 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

**Leszek Iwaskow**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**