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23 November 2011

Mrs S Leach
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Leach

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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is good.

- Given their starting points, pupils make good progress in geography and by the end of Year 6 attain standards that are in line with national expectations. Pupils' attainment is improving but too few reach the higher National Curriculum levels.
- At the end of Year 6, pupils have a sound understanding of physical processes, for example, related to the water cycle and rivers, and understand the meaning of key vocabulary. They are able to write extended pieces of work about places and processes that are strong on description but less so on explanation and identifying cause and effect.
- Pupils' map skills are well developed and they can accurately use maps at a range of scales.

- In Year 2, pupils have a basic knowledge of places they have studied, such as where Australia is and some of the main features of the country. They can use simple coordinates to locate places on a map and are beginning to be able to describe similarities and differences of two different places.
- In the lessons observed, the pupils made good progress. In Year 5, they were starting to understand the idea of 'food miles' and could describe the environmental disadvantages long-distance transport can cause. In Year 4, they were very carefully analysing photographs of different places and presenting logical geographical explanations as to where they might be located. Year 1 pupils were investigating cold and warm seas and could present simple reasons as to why only certain creatures could live in these environments.
- Pupils' behaviour in all lessons was at least good. They worked well together in small groups and showed enthusiasm and enjoyment in the work they were doing.

Quality of teaching in geography

The quality of teaching in geography is good.

- Teachers plan lessons well, identifying the key aspects to be covered and providing a clear structure for learning.
- In lessons, they have clear expectations of what pupils should learn and share these learning objectives at the outset. On occasions, the expectations do not focus sufficiently on the higher National Curriculum levels.
- Although teachers are not subject specialists, they confidently explain key geographical knowledge and display an enthusiasm for learning and why geography is important.
- Teachers successfully use a broad range of strategies to engage pupils in their learning, including role play. They group pupils according to the activities set and change these as required. Good use is made of 'talk partners' where pupils share and explore their understanding.
- A good range of resources to support learning is used effectively, especially maps and atlases at different scales. The interactive whiteboard is used well to support whole-class teaching and pupils have access to computers on a regular basis.
- Teaching assistants are deployed effectively either to support individuals with specific learning needs or to focus on certain activities. They are clear of their role in supporting learning.
- Frequent, well-targeted open questioning and feedback provides individual pupils with a clear picture of how well they are learning in lessons.
- Detailed marking of pupils work is a regular feature and written comments focus on what pupils have done well and how they can improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is outstanding.

- The curriculum is planned so that it meets pupils' needs. It is relevant and topical and reviewed regularly. Excellent use is made of international links, for example, Year 2 are following the travels of a teacher across Australia which helps bring their work to life.
- There are geography-specific units in each year group. Opportunities to apply subject skills in other themes are also clearly identified. A good amount of time is provided for teaching the geography curriculum.
- The National Curriculum has been carefully analysed so that increasingly difficult work that focuses on developing pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills is planned in each unit.
- Pupils have very good opportunities for fieldwork in all years that include the use of the school grounds alongside a range of visits.
- Pupils participate in a broad range of enrichment activities that help reinforce learning in geography.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is outstanding.

- The subject leader has worked very successfully in raising standards and improving the provision in geography over the last few years and this has led to geography having a prominent place in the school.
- The subject leader has a high level of expertise and willingly shares this with the staff.
- The monitoring of all aspects of work in the subject is comprehensive and rigorous and results in detailed and accurate evaluation. This, in turn, supports manageable and well-focused action plans.
- A good emphasis is placed on seeking pupils' view about their learning and using this to modify the curriculum.
- The recognition of the work of the subject leader and staff through a national quality award reflects their continuing commitment to providing a high-quality geography experience for all pupils.
- Access to professional development has been very good and the outcomes of this have been successfully disseminated to the staff.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving pupils' overall attainment by ensuring that a greater proportion reach the higher National Curriculum levels
- ensuring that all staff fully understand the quality of work expected in order for pupils to attain National Curriculum levels that are beyond age-related expectations.

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

Paul Dowgill
Additional Inspector