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Mr I Wilson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Wilson

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 23 January 2012 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.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is satisfactory.

- Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills below those expected nationally in knowledge and understanding of the world. They make good progress in Reception due to a range of activities which develops their curiosity of the world around them. Attainment at the end of Year 6 is broadly in line with age-related expectations.
- Geographical knowledge and understanding develop well, but skills in fieldwork are underdeveloped. The school has prioritised the development of fieldwork skills. Insufficient use is made of the outdoor environment.
- Pupils demonstrate a good knowledge of distant places and show a desire to learn. They are able to articulate with confidence the location of places using geographical terms. For example, Year 2 pupils knew the location of Mexico, including the ocean and sea to the east and west.

- Pupils are positive about learning geographically. Behaviour seen during lessons was good and cooperative learning enhanced the progress made during activities.

Quality of teaching in geography

The quality of teaching in geography is good.

- Subject knowledge is appropriate and often good. Pupils show an interest in activities and are motivated to succeed. Where teacher's knowledge is less secure they use prompts and support to ensure that pupils acquire effective skills and understanding.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well to enhance learning, including the use of visualisers. Resources are used appropriately and are relevant to the purpose and activity. Lessons use geographical information systems (GIS), although this could be enhanced further. Staff confidence is developing in using equipment to improve the quality of provision.
- Enquiry-based learning is used well in lessons. This provides a good stimulus for pupils to make progress in their learning. Pupils' interests are taken into account in set topics and, as a result, they have some ownership of their own learning.
- Teachers use questioning to check pupils learning and understanding. Lessons are structured to build on prior learning within a unit of work. Through open-ended questions, teachers guide pupils to the next steps in their learning.
- A portfolio of evidence captures geographical study across the school. It shows cross-curricular links and how geography is supporting learning in other subjects. Currently, this work is not moderated to evidence progression. Furthermore, end of key stage judgements have not been agreed or verified.
- Marking of pupils' work mainly affirms pupils' efforts but does not fully support successes or areas to develop within geographical knowledge, skills and understanding. Assessments are made by class teachers on all pupils. However, these assessments could inform the teaching and learning to a greater extent to ensure that pupils' needs are fully met.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- The curriculum provides a context for learning and the school has an agreed scheme of work. The programme of study does not, however, focus specifically on pupils' needs within the context of the local community.
- Geography on an international scale is given appropriate relevance. For example, through fundraising activities, pupils are taught about locations and environments, such as the 'Send a Cow' appeal.

- Displays indicate a geographical focus across the school and reflect the schools adopted scheme of work.
- Links with ICT are becoming embedded to enhance pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. Although links with more subjects are developing, currently insufficient use is made of pupils' specific interests.
- Too little emphasis is given to first-hand experiences. Insufficient use is made of the outdoor environment. As a consequence, pupils have a limited awareness of their own locality and how this contrasts with other areas in the United Kingdom.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is satisfactory.

- The subject leader shows a great enthusiasm for the teaching of geography and is keen to make improvements. She has an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses and has developed an appropriate action plan. Developments include improving the monitoring of the quality of provision and improving fieldwork. The subject has an agreed budget allocation.
- Some monitoring of pupils' geographical work has taken place, but lesson observations have not occurred. The subject leader is keen to develop this aspect of work to provide valuable support to teachers to make improvements to the teaching of geography.
- Professional support and development are currently limited. The school does not use resources and support from subject associations to keep staff abreast of new developments. School leaders focus on how geography is taught rather than on moving the subject and its impact forward.
- A named link governor on the governing body meets regularly with the subject leader. This provides the school with a good level of support and challenge.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- sharpening marking and assessment to focus on geographical understanding and skills to be developed
- improving the quality of fieldwork to further develop pupils' geographical knowledge, skills and understanding
- improving the curriculum by providing greater relevance to the immediate locality and using a cross-curricular approach to make learning relevant and purposeful.

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

Jane Millward
Her Majesty's Inspector