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Mr A Breakwell
Acting Headteacher
Northwick Manor Primary School
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Dear Mr Breakwell

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 31 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 a governor, staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of seven lessons (or parts of lessons, including some fieldwork).

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is good.

- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage gain a good understanding of basic geographical concepts such as the weather and seasons. They know which clothes to wear in hot and cold climates. Children enjoy learning through role play, such as in their 'BBC weather studio'. They also gain significantly from using the extensive school grounds to learn woodland skills and finding their way on simple plans. Almost all pupils reach or exceed age-related expectations by the end of the Reception Year.
- Key Stage 1 pupils rapidly build on these skills and undertake environmental surveys, and find out more about the local area. By Year 2, pupils have a clear idea of the features that are essential in an ideal locality and those that are desirable. They can discuss traffic problems and possible solutions.

- Key Stage 2 pupils are enthusiastic geographers and are able to ask good geographical enquiry questions. Teachers often build whole topics around these questions, so that pupils gain an in-depth knowledge of geographical issues such as the problems of living on a river flood plain. Knowledge of maps, including the use of Google Earth, develops appropriately but knowledge of topographical features on maps is somewhat limited.
- Pupils' knowledge and understanding are also extended effectively by visits to a linked intercity school in Birmingham and to one in The Malvern Hills. Their international knowledge covers broad physical themes such as mountains and human aspects are enriched through their email links with a school in India.
- Pupils leave the school with a good broad foundation for their future geographical learning. They are able to accurately identify similarities and differences between places and are, almost without exception, at or above the national level in their skills and understanding in the subject.

Quality of teaching in geography

The quality of teaching in geography is good.

- Lessons are lively, well planned and build well on the national programmes of study and the pupils' own interests.
- Teachers are skilled at assessing what pupils have already learnt and in looking for ways to extend this knowledge. They look for special opportunities to enrich experiences, such as those associated with the residential visit to France, and also use opportunities such as the accumulation of litter on the school grounds as starting points to explore various environmental ideas. The school's Eco club also raises pupils' awareness of sustainability issues.
- Pupils work well together as investigative groups due to good class management and the staff's determination to further promote pupils' personal responsibility for their own learning.
- Homework in the subject is completed to a good standard and pupils often go beyond the basic requirements. Teachers mark the work conscientiously so pupils' learning is celebrated and extended.
- Teaching is consistently good and some is outstanding. Even the good lessons have outstanding moments where excellent resources or group investigations lead to the pupils gaining a profound understanding of a particular geographical aspect; for example of the impact of floods on a family who had just moved into a new house.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is good.

- A great deal of work has been done recently to ensure that the curriculum is relevant and it has the clear potential to be outstanding as it is fully embedded. It includes topics where the pupils elect to take on 'The Mantle

of the Expert'; this enables them to lead on wide ranging investigative topics such as those related to the Japanese tsunami.

- Fieldwork is regular and pupils gain a variety of appropriate skills although it is not always clear that these are sufficiently progressive year on year.
- Creative approaches are used and the school has had its own 'Sky News centre' with regular up dates on world events. The email link with the school in India also gives pupils a less stereotypical view of the country.
- The curriculum is adaptable if a significant geographical event occurs and captures the pupils' interest. Pupils also link topics such as the Roman experience of the places they conquered and how volcanoes affected a particular culture. Occasionally, the key geographical points are insufficiently emphasised; for example, the Vikings' use of sea and rivers routes.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- Leaders at all levels keep a watchful eye on the balance of provision within the topic approach. They monitor pupils' work and the quality of lessons well. Classes have mark books showing how all pupils are progressing in the subject each year. Governors take an active interest in the subject and have monitored its implementation well.
- Resources are sufficient but the tight budget has restricted the amount of direct professional development that leaders have had in the subject. Staff development has mostly been on the wider issues related to personalising the curriculum. The school does not currently belong to any of the subject associations; although it keeps up to date in general terms via their free website material.
- Leaders have ensured that teachers are confident in using information and communication technology but have yet to fully exploit geographical information systems, beyond Google Earth.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- checking that fieldwork skills are sufficiently progressive year on year so that pupils develop a full range of methods of recording in the field
- gaining more experience of the extensive geographical information systems that are now available, possibly through membership of a subject association.

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

Mo Roberts
Her Majesty's Inspector