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Mrs A Palmer
Headteacher
Mount Pleasant Church of England Voluntary Controlled Junior School
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Dear Mrs Palmer

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 7 February 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 observations of seven lessons with you.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is good.

- Pupils make good progress in improving their understanding of geographical concepts through a thematic curriculum that engages their interest well. Their geographical knowledge and skills are deepened and extended as they progress through school. For example, Year 3 pupils used geographical terms accurately to describe the physical features of rivers and drew on prior learning, to identify similarities between different river basins.
- Pupils are keenly aware of environmental issues and the importance of using resources sustainably, for example, through the 'switch off fortnight' initiative. They are proud that the school has recently received the 'Green Flag' award for the fourth year and understand well how they can contribute to the eco-school action plan.

- Pupils use different types of maps confidently to locate places and describe simple distributions, for example, the location of tropical and temperate rainforests on a global scale. They can also provide examples of the value of maps in other subjects, for example, in locating countries within the British Empire in history and maps showing the distribution of planets across the universe in science.
- Changes to the curriculum over the last three years have increased pupils' engagement in geography and interest in the world around them. Workbooks and classroom displays reflect pupils' pride in their work and enjoyment of the subject.

Quality of teaching in geography

The quality of teaching in geography is good.

- Teaching is characterised by secure subject knowledge throughout the school. Good teaching was observed where teachers engaged pupils actively in investigations and used group work to solve problems. For example, different maps and atlases were provided for groups of Year 3 pupils who were seeking clues that would help them to identify the location of Marseille.
- Where teaching was observed to be satisfactory, the pace of learning was controlled more by the teacher and opportunities were missed for pupils, particularly those who are less able, to work independently on investigations and to develop their own hypotheses or ideas.
- Pupils' workbooks indicate that teachers use a good range of strategies over time to develop pupils' understanding and awareness of different places on a local, national and global scale. A strong emphasis is placed on the factors that influence environmental change. For example, in Year 5 lessons, pupils reflected on selected images to identify the impact of global warming on different communities around the world. They recorded their observations carefully, using appropriate geographical terms.
- Pupils are enthusiastic about their geography work and enjoy using a variety of resources, including computers and modern technologies, photographs, maps and satellite imagery to complete tasks set by their teachers.
- Pupils are aware of their targets and are responsive to feedback given. However, lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work indicates that opportunities are missed for pupils to take greater responsibility for assessing their own work and identifying for themselves their next steps for learning.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is good.

- Geography is threaded effectively through the thematic curriculum and pupils understand and appreciate its relevance when studying different topics. For example, Year 6 pupils working on the cross-curricular 'Titanic'

unit could describe the location of the disaster and explain accurately the formation of icebergs and the hazard they present to shipping.

- Cross-curricular links with literacy, numeracy, science and information and communication technology are well established and enhance improvements in subject knowledge. For example, Year 6 pupils could explain the value of learning about coordinates in numeracy and how this would help when working out grid references on an Ordnance Survey map or lines of latitude and longitude in an atlas.
- Suitable opportunities are provided for pupils to participate in fieldwork activities and the outdoor environment is used to support learning. However, as a priority, leaders have identified the need to integrate fieldwork more fully across the curriculum.
- Extra-curricular activities enrich the geography curriculum. Each class takes responsibility for one aspect of the eco-schools action plan and links with a school in Cameroon increase pupils' understanding of different lifestyles and culture. Year 6 pupils also provide regular briefings in assemblies about current news at local, national and international level to increase pupils' awareness of the global community.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- Geography has a high profile across the school and has increased in popularity following curriculum developments in recent years. Leaders review schemes of work regularly and following a recent audit, have taken action to increase opportunities for fieldwork investigations.
- The subject coordinator has an accurate view of geography provision through scrutiny of pupils' work. Agreed success criteria are used by staff consistently to assess pupils' work and monitor their progress in each class. However, leaders recognise that assessment information could be used more effectively to evaluate the impact of provision on pupils' outcomes over time.
- Teachers share a common purpose in seeking to improve provision further. For example, training has increased awareness about different geographical information systems (GIS) to enhance teaching strategies.
- Resources, including GIS are relevant, interesting and updated regularly to capture pupils' interest. Wall displays around the school are vibrant and reflect not only current themes of study but also the good contribution made by geography to wider whole-school priorities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising achievement further by:
 - increasing opportunities for independent learning to maximise the progress made by all pupils

- providing more opportunities for pupils to assess their own work and identify for themselves the next steps in their learning
- using assessment information more rigorously to evaluate the impact of geography provision on pupils' outcomes over time to inform future planning for improvement

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

Sara Morrissey
Her Majesty's Inspector