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Mrs V Shield  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Shield

### **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 20 March 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.

- Pupils have a sound understanding of the location of different places and how they are linked. They acquire a suitable geographical vocabulary to describe and explain physical and human features. However, the use of key terminology is not embedded throughout their work to reinforce and deepen their learning.
- Pupils' knowledge of human environments in different parts of the world is a particular strength and reflects the school's aim to teach pupils about communities that are different to their own.
- Pupils' knowledge of physical environments is less well developed and fieldwork is not used consistently to develop pupils' enquiry skills so that they can make the links between human activity and its impact on the physical environment.

- Maps are used regularly to locate places, particularly on a global scale and map extracts support pupils' learning about specific countries, for example, Trinidad and Tobago. Pupils report that they use internet sites to identify places of local interest on aerial photographs, as part of a study of Sunderland.
- Although pupils' achievement in geography is satisfactory, their progress in the subject is accelerating. This is because teachers have an accurate view of what pupils know and understand, in relation to key geographical concepts, due to the introduction of a more rigorous approach to assessment.
- Recent adaptations to the curriculum are beginning to build on the relative strengths in the progress made by younger children and pupils in Key Stage 1. Consequently, the depth of pupils' learning in geography is increasing. For example, a recent field visit to a local site earmarked for redevelopment enabled Year 6 pupils to investigate the reasons for change, the potential impact on the environment and how the land might be best used in future.
- Well-established routines promote a positive learning community throughout the school. Pupils behave well and respond to new challenges with enthusiasm. Their positive attitudes contribute well to the increased pace of learning in the subject.

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

The quality of teaching in geography is good.

- Good generic teaching skills, combined with an accurate view of pupils' individual learning needs, have contributed to improvements in the quality of teaching and its impact on learning. However, these are yet to have an impact on overall achievement.
- Teaching is characterised by planning that is targeted well to develop pupils' geographical skills. Resources are tailored effectively to meet pupils' different needs. Activities are briskly paced to motivate pupils to extend their learning.
- Fieldwork is integrated into curriculum topics where appropriate. However, opportunities are missed to capitalise on outdoor learning experiences to develop pupils' geographical enquiry skills.
- Pupils are active participants in their learning and have positive views about geography. They have particularly enjoyed the 'Carnival' topic that has engaged them in activities that forge good links with pupils at a school in Trinidad and Tobago and increased their understanding of different environments and cultures. They respond readily to teachers' feedback which they find helpful because it identifies what they have achieved and the next steps to improve their learning.

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

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- In the past, geography has not had a high profile in the school's creative curriculum which is rich and diverse in many other respects. However, wider whole-school initiatives, including the links with schools in Trinidad and Tobago and South Africa as well as those in a more ethnically diverse area in their own locality, promote pupils' understanding of interdependence and the importance of diversity.
- Recent adaptations to the curriculum, including outdoor learning experiences, have increased opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of geographical concepts and this is contributing to more rapid improvements in their knowledge and skill development.
- Pupils can identify where there are links between geography and other subjects, including history, art and science that they study through a thematic approach to the curriculum as well as extra-curricular activities. For example, pupils in the 'green team' play an important role in raising awareness within the school community about the importance of recycling and saving electricity to help save the environment.
- Geography makes a good contribution to the development of pupils' literacy and information and communication technology skills (ICT). However, leaders acknowledge that the development of specific geographical skills is not always identified clearly through the curriculum.
- Following a subject audit, schemes of work are being adapted to maximise the impact of learning opportunities on developing geographical knowledge and skills over time.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- Effective strategic decisions taken by senior leaders have improved the quality and impact of teaching in geography over the last year. For example, an existing rigorous assessment procedure has been adapted to measure progress accurately in the subject. This has identified where pupils have gaps in their geographical skills and knowledge and enabled teachers to plan more accurately to accelerate pupils' achievement in the subject.
- The subject leader has identified accurately the strengths and weaknesses in provision and is using resources produced by professional associations to improve pupils' understanding of key concepts. However, leaders have been disappointed by the lack of available professional development opportunities to develop subject-specific skills to enhance teaching further, particularly in relation to fieldwork.
- Teachers have responded positively to recent curriculum developments and have applied good generic teaching skills to improve schemes of work that promote better progress. Effective whole-school structures to review pupils' progress and share good practice regularly have enabled teachers to evaluate the impact of their teaching to improve provision further.
- Pupils benefit from a very positive climate for learning that is embedded across the school. Enrichment activities, that include residential visits to

participate in outdoor learning, promote the development of enquiry skills and contribute well to their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development. The subject reflects the school's wider priorities to increase pupils' awareness of their role as citizens within the local, national and global community.

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

- embedding the use of geographical terminology to reinforce and deepen pupils' learning of key concepts
- ensuring that the development of geographical skills are made explicit in lesson planning and schemes of work to ensure progression over time
- capitalising on outdoor learning opportunities and fieldwork to support the development of geographical enquiry skills.

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.

Yours sincerely

**Sara Morrissey**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**