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Mrs K Armstrong
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Armstrong

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 13 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 two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is good.

- The standards attained by the large majority of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are in line with national expectations. Higher attaining pupils are working at a level that is above average expectations.
- All groups of pupils, given their starting points, are making good progress.
- In Year 6, pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of places and physical processes related to extreme environments such as volcanoes, the Arctic and deserts. A particular strength is their ability to write high-quality extended pieces of writing in a range of styles, including accurate factual accounts and balanced arguments.

- Pupils' skills in mapwork develop progressively across the school and they are confident users of atlases and maps, including internet-based applications, at a range of scales. Pupils in the lower school can describe fieldwork techniques more accurately than those in the upper years.
- In the lessons observed all pupils made at least good progress. In Year 6, they demonstrated good independent learning skills, worked very effectively in groups and displayed high levels of resilience when faced with challenging tasks, for example, in planning an expedition from England to climb Mount Uhuru, Tanzania. In Year 3, pupils effectively analysed photographs and text to develop their understanding of the life of people in a village in Egypt.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive. They enjoy geography and show enthusiasm and a curiosity for learning and, as a result, their behaviour is excellent.

Quality of teaching in geography

The quality of teaching in geography is good.

- Teachers have high expectations of pupils. They plan in depth and detail and a real strength is the planning of learning activities that provide challenge and are well matched to pupils' individual needs.
- Although not subject specialists, teachers have a good level of subject knowledge and apply this with confidence in their planning and teaching.
- Teachers use broad range of teaching strategies effectively to engage pupils in learning. These are supported by high-quality resources including the thoughtful use of a range of multimedia.
- A variety of pupil groupings are used well to support learning and teachers are providing pupils with increasing opportunities to learn independently.
- The use of questioning and discussion, often through paired talk, is employed effectively to both clarify and embed learning.
- In lessons, teachers monitor pupils' progress well and intervene at appropriate points to support learning.
- The day-to-day marking of pupils' work is good with clear comments about the quality of the written responses and suggestions to indicate how this could be improved. Some pupils follow up these targets very well through detailed written replies.
- The less frequent assessment of pupils' work over time using National Curriculum levels is in development.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is good.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced, and structured so there are geography-specific themes in each year.

- The time allocated ensures that there is good coverage of the Key Stage 2 programmes of study.
- The curriculum is reviewed on a regular basis with new themes introduced, so maintaining its relevance to pupils' needs and interests. The mapping of the curriculum in each year against the required knowledge, understanding and skills ensure that, whatever the theme, key aspects are taught.
- Progression in the curriculum is evident and strongest in the development of skills. In certain year groups geographical processes are taught without reference to specific places and so have less meaning to the pupils.
- Opportunities for fieldwork are identified in the curriculum but are more geography specific in Years 3 and 4.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- The recently appointed subject leader is an enthusiastic advocate for geography and has a good understanding of current developments in the subject.
- The subject leader is working effectively with colleagues in the 'This is our world' team to further develop the quality of geography.
- A good range of monitoring activities is in place, including seeking the views of pupils and staff alongside scrutinising planning and pupils' work. Lesson observation is planned for the near future.
- As a result of the evaluation of provision, an action plan with clear areas for improvement has been implemented and there is a shared common purpose among staff to raise attainment and improve the quality of geography.
- There are excellent displays of pupils' work in classrooms and around the school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- reviewing the formal level-based assessment process in order that:
 - the key aspects of the geography curriculum are assessed
 - staff and pupils clearly understand the standards required to meet the different National Curriculum levels
- developing the programme of fieldwork, particularly in Years 5 and 6, as well as making better use of the school grounds to support this.

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

Paul Dowgill
Additional Inspector