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22 May 2012

Mrs K O'Hanlon
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs O'Hanlon

Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 30 April 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; a learning walk through the Early Years Foundation Stage unit and observation of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is good.

- Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with knowledge and skills below those expected nationally in knowledge and understanding of the world. Pupils make good progress in relation to their general awareness of their locality and environment.
- By the end of Year 2 pupils are able to draw maps of the local area, and can identify and locate key buildings and facilities using knowledge gained from visits and the study of aerial photographs. They are able to give directions and follow routes using appropriate geographical vocabulary.
- Pupils' progress as they move through the school is inconsistent. By the time they reach Year 6, overall attainment is satisfactory reflecting good progress from their starting points.

- Progress is inconsistent because the thematic approach employed by the school sometimes results in an imbalance between the acquisition of geographical knowledge and understanding in comparison with other subjects. This was particularly evident in relation to places in the United Kingdom and across the world and the extent to which the natural environment influenced significant outcomes.
- Pupils are encouraged to use appropriate geographical vocabulary. Year 6 pupils talked with confidence when describing the journey of a river using terms such as, source, meander, flood plain and estuary. They know what 'erosion' means and are able to describe the impact it can have on the physical environment.
- Pupils enjoy geography, especially when they are engaged in activities that involve collecting data during fieldwork or when undertaking research using information and communication technology (ICT) such as 'Google Earth'.

Quality of teaching in geography

The quality of teaching in geography is good.

- Teachers demonstrate good generic teaching skills. Lessons are delivered with pace that is enhanced by effective questioning that promotes discussion and geographical thinking. Good use is made of talking partners and group work is monitored carefully by well-deployed teaching assistants which result in pupils remaining on task.
- On occasions, teachers plan to cover too much during the lesson. This is because of lesson planning that contains too many broad learning objectives. This results in superficial understanding which restricts progress.
- Classrooms are well organised and provide a stimulating environment for learning with informative displays and interesting resources. Good opportunities are taken to share and celebrate pupils' work in geography thereby promoting pupils' curiosity.
- Good use is made of resources, including maps, atlases, globes and aerial photographs. ICT is used well to enhance teaching and learning by visually engaging pupils and challenging their thinking.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly and effectively with a good balance between evaluative comments and specific guidance as to how they may improve.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- While the curriculum is planned to meet National Curriculum requirements it does not support progression effectively. The thematic approach addresses the programmes of study for each key stage over a two-year cycle. However, in some year groups, teachers' planning does not cater for

the development of geographical knowledge, skills and understanding in as much depth in comparison with other subjects.

- Opportunities are provided for pupils to apply skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT and this enhances their understanding. For example, as part of a study of contrasting places in the UK, Year 6 pupils retrieved information from the internet, collected and analysed data, and then drafted and presented their findings to the class.
- On occasions, outdoor learning opportunities enable pupils to develop fieldwork skills as part of their studies, for example, when studying 'Our Locality' in the Foundation Stage/Key Stage 1; the city of Hull in Years 3 and 4; and rivers in Years 5 and 6. On these visits they are able to develop observational skills and collect and record information at first hand. However, residential visits do not incorporate planned opportunities for pupils to engage in fieldwork.
- Global Awareness, to develop pupils' understanding of sustainability and interdependence, is promoted satisfactorily through the curriculum and a reciprocal link with a school in Free Town, Sierra Leone, has recently been established.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- The subject leader together with the senior leadership team has an accurate understanding of the subject's strengths and areas requiring development. They have not been complacent in their determination to raise achievement further and the capacity to sustain improvement is good.
- As a result of accurate self-evaluation, plans are already in place to review the planning of topics to ensure equitable coverage between subjects.
- The subject leader monitors provision and pupils' outcomes through a scrutiny of pupils' work and teachers' planning. Discussions with pupils are conducted to ascertain what they have learnt as well as to find out what their perceptions of the subject are. Senior leaders monitor performance but not sufficiently rigorously enough in relation to the quality of teaching in geography.
- Assessment procedures are well established throughout the school. Data are collated and analysed by the subject leader before being presented to staff. As a result, the school is well placed to monitor pupils' progress.
- Opportunities for continuing professional development in geography are limited. The school is not currently a member of one of the geographical associations.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- reviewing the quality of teachers' planning so that themes reflect a better balance between opportunities to acquire geographical knowledge and understanding in comparison with development in other subjects

- ensuring that all teachers are clear about what it is that pupils are to learn during lessons
- making effective use of the support and resources provided by one of the subject associations to promote geographical learning.

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

Christopher Keeler
Her Majesty's Inspector