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Mrs C Williams
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Williams

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 17 May 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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is outstanding.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is outstanding.

- Attainment in geography is high. This is because teaching very effectively challenges pupils' thinking and, as a result, they make outstanding progress. Human and physical geography are taught very effectively, developing a natural curiosity of the world. Learning is given a context and relevance. This results in pupils' outstanding achievement.
- The creative curriculum ensures that geography is used as a vehicle to develop a wide range of skills, including literacy, numeracy and science. Pupils develop a wide range of skills and enjoy the challenge of geographical investigations. For example, in a Year 6 lessons pupils used a topological map to investigate the best way to travel to the Olympic stadium. Pupils can express opinions, back up arguments with secure evidence, test hypotheses and write fluently.

- Pupils' knowledge of places is outstanding. They have a strong sense of place through the regular use of maps and atlases. They understand issues around the world. They talk confidently about places they have studied and are aware of places through real-life situations, such as through charitable work, supporting a child in Ecuador.
- Pupils are enthusiastic learners who have a hunger to learn about the world around them. They are inquisitive about global issues and readily debate with one another.
- Pupils demonstrate outstanding attitudes to learning and excellent behaviour. They work extremely well as a team and cooperation skills are promoted through an enquiry and investigative approach to learning. Pupils become independent and confident learners.

Quality of teaching in geography

The quality of teaching in geography is outstanding.

- Teachers have excellent knowledge of the subject. Lessons incorporate teamwork and collaboration skills and are highly successful as a result. Questioning techniques by teachers are used effectively to extend and support pupils' learning. Pupils are keen to take risks and relish in the challenges set by teachers.
- Teachers make very good use of the outdoor environment, the local community and a range of resources. Though information and communication technology (ICT) and geographical information systems (GIS) are used it is not systematic enough in all lessons.
- Lessons have a clear structure which seamlessly guides pupils to make outstanding progress. This was skilfully facilitated, for example, in an outstanding Year 3 lesson where pupils learnt about erosion through poetry and role play. Pupils learnt about types of rock across the UK and used a poem about the sea to learn how erosion of coastlines takes place. The lesson ended with an investigation of rock types and which would be more susceptible to erosion. The lesson was interactive, fun and highly informative.
- Best practice is shared and planning is collaborative. Assessments are made of what pupils can and cannot achieve, based on geographical knowledge, skills and understanding. This is in its early stages of development and is not yet fully embedded across the school. Teachers however, know pupils very well and their needs are met exceptionally well.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is outstanding.

- The school teaches geography through the creative curriculum. It is imaginative, stimulates pupils' learning and fully meets the needs of all learners. Topics take into account what pupils already know, what they want to learn and incorporate an evaluation which reviews learning.

- Each topic begins with a 'kick start' day, such as orienteering in Year 4 when studying the 'frozen planet' and a trip to Pooles Cavern in Year 3 when looking at caves. These activities provide an exciting stimulus for pupils' learning.
- A progression of skills is routinely developed through an effective curriculum and highly organised schemes of work.
- Pupils experience fieldwork on a regular basis and plans to promote and build upon fieldwork skills are clear and well directed.
- The curriculum is continually developing. Effective use is made of sustainability issues and pupils' role as global citizens is very well supported, including preparing talks to be delivered at The Royal Exchange Theatre.
- Aspects of geography are sensitively and carefully woven into the curriculum. For example, children's rights and responsibilities are studied, resulting in the school achieving the Rights Respecting School Award. The school's Eco Club further raises pupils' awareness of sustainability issues.
- The outstanding curriculum is still evolving. This reflects the ambition of everyone in school to provide the very best for all the pupils.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is outstanding.

- Geography is given a high profile across the school and forms a large part of the creative curriculum. As you stated, 'It's the glue that holds the curriculum together.'
- Systems and procedures to ensure that geography continues to develop are clearly evident. Regular reviews of geography take place and a continual drive for improvement permeates through the school.
- Leaders evaluate strengths and weaknesses and know the effectiveness of the subject. This does not, however, lead to complacency. Leaders are continually striving for further improvement and collaborate closely with a range of partners such as the local secondary schools.
- Monitoring of provision is routinely embedded and governors are involved in challenging leaders. Teachers regularly update governors. As a result, governors have a very good understanding of the effectiveness of geography.
- Development planning is accurate and provides a clear focus for future improvement. The success of this planning is evaluated and monitored with rigour.
- The school uses information from the geographical associations effectively and this secures high-quality provision.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- further developing GIS to routinely enhance teaching

- continuing to refine assessments to gain a more accurate picture of attainment in all areas of geographical knowledge, skills and understanding.

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

Jane Millward
Her Majesty's Inspector