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Mr J Moffitt
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Dear Mr Moffitt

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 21 June 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 parts of 10 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is satisfactory.

- Children enter the Nursery with levels of knowledge and understanding of the world that are similar to those of most four-year-old pupils. They make a good start to their learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Interesting and engaging themes coupled with good teaching and highly effective assessment ensure that children make good progress. Good use is made of the local environment and this is supported by a highly relevant play-based curriculum. Children have a good understanding of seasonal changes and have plentiful opportunities to observe, explore and record.
- This good progress continues in Year 1 where work successfully builds on pupils' prior learning. The local area is used effectively to further develop pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding. Good use is made of the forest school to develop children's language and observational skills.

- From this point onwards, pupils make satisfactory progress so that by the end of Year 6 their attainment is broadly average. Most themes, such as the study of Chembakoli and 'Chocoholics', provide suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their skills. One or two themes are excellently taught. For example, the H2O and rivers themes in Year 5 equip pupils with a detailed knowledge and understanding of these aspects. Although pupils are aware of the themes that they have studied some find it difficult to recall key facts.
- Pupils are well behaved in lessons, show interest in their work and sustain their concentration. They particularly enjoy those lessons that are practical, such as making their own sedimentary rocks out of biscuits and different types of chocolate in Year 3.

Quality of teaching in geography

The quality of teaching in geography is satisfactory.

- Lessons observed were well planned and resourced, and teachers exhibited good subject knowledge. In good lessons, the pace was brisk so pupils made good progress in their learning. Teachers make good use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support their teaching.
- The pace of learning was not rapid enough in some lessons because teachers spent too much time clarifying information. Also, pupils were seated on the carpet for too long listening to over-lengthy introductions before starting their activities.
- The classroom environment is stimulating. A good range of maps is provided and 'working walls' containing key geographical vocabulary are used routinely to support learning. Good support is provided by teaching assistants.
- In the main, an appropriate range of work is recorded in books although some themes taught in some year groups show good depth of coverage. Work is regularly marked but is mainly affirmative and does not always indicate what pupils need to do to improve.
- The 'learning journey' assessment documents in the Early Years Foundation Stage are outstanding. They provide a detailed assessment of children's strengths and weaknesses in key themes.
- Portfolios of evidence summarise pupils' learning in each year group but these are not annotated to give an indication of the levels pupils are working at. The school does not have assessment and monitoring procedures in place for foundation subjects.
- Homework provision is innovative. Pupils are able to select from a range of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic activities and experiences. Some of the work produced in the excellent 'homework logs' is of high quality.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- Although curriculum coverage is good in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Year 1, it is satisfactory overall. Throughout the school, an appropriate range of themes is taught, but some do not develop or build on pupils' geographical skills and knowledge in sufficient depth or complexity.
- Regular opportunities are provided for pupils to use maps in a variety of ways. However, pupils' are sometimes provided with activities that are too similar in different year groups. Also, older pupils are not challenged to extend their skills to a higher level by using, for example, Ordnance Survey maps.
- Good opportunities are provided for pupils to develop their skills in other subjects such as literacy, art and ICT. In addition, a good range of fieldwork is undertaken, including visits to the local area and places such as Bicester, Cotswold Farm Park and Kilvrough.
- The association with a school in Uganda is known by some pupils, but many do not have a good understanding of the school's location or the purpose of the links. Pupils' understanding of sustainability is suitably developed through the herb and vegetable gardens. This supports pupils' understanding of environmental issues satisfactorily.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is satisfactory.

- Curriculum leaders are keen to improve the subject and have a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses through a good range of monitoring and evaluation strategies such as management learning walks and book scrutinies.
- Formal opportunities are not provided for staff to observe the work undertaken in different year groups through activities such as moderation meetings or teacher learning walks.
- Subject leaders have developed a geographical and enquiry-skills overview but this has not been implemented by staff to enable them to evaluate whether key skills are being taught sequentially.
- The school has not used the resources and support available from subject associations to help keep teachers informed of new developments in the subject or enable them to take opportunities for subject-specific professional development.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- applying the geographical and enquiry-skills overview with staff to evaluate whether key skills are being sufficiently taught throughout the school
- providing opportunities for staff to check continuity and progression through the school through formal opportunities such as learning walks

- implementing a manageable and meaningful assessment system which enables staff to understand how many pupils are on track to meet or exceed national expectations
- using support and guidance provided by subject associations to further support the development of the subject.

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

Paul Weston
Her Majesty's Inspector