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Mr M Gardener
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Dear Mr Gardener

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 27 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 two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is inadequate.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is inadequate.

- On entry to Reception class, the majority of pupils have very limited knowledge or understanding of their environment and the world beyond their immediate locality.
- While progress from these starting points is satisfactory in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, progress in Key Stage 2 is inadequate.
- Pupils develop some simple fieldwork and observational skills in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 through access to the local environment and through Forest School activities where they complete simple environmental surveys. However, these skills are not developed in Key Stage 2.
- The lack of a cohesive and coherent programme for geography results in fragmented experiences and progress for pupils, especially in Key Stage 2.

While they develop some knowledge of environmental issues, their understanding of physical environments and the interconnectiveness between places is too limited. Also, often, simple geographical skills are developed at the expense of knowledge and understanding.

- Pupils' ability to locate places accurately varies greatly; most have limited spatial awareness. Directional language is also often used inaccurately which compounds this issue.
- Pupils' awareness of contrasting places has been raised through the school's links with Comenius partners in other locations. However, they lack more in-depth knowledge or understanding of what places are like.
- Behaviour in lessons is satisfactory. Pupils say they enjoy geography, however, at Key Stage 2 this relates mainly to experiences linked to undemanding research tasks using computers. Thinking and making connections are less evident.

Quality of teaching in geography

The quality of teaching in geography is inadequate.

- Although some satisfactory teaching was observed, the fragmented teaching programme and lack of challenge in much of the work set at Key Stage 2 mean that teaching overall does not support geographical learning well enough.
- Teachers have good generic teaching skills but lack the subject knowledge or expertise to be able to teach geographically. As a result, resources such as Google maps, interactive whiteboards and video clips are sometimes not used effectively enough to support learning.
- Expectations at Key Stage 2 are too low and often the tasks set do not sufficiently challenge or engage pupils. For example, research about countries participating in the Olympics results in pupils drawing and colouring in flags and downloading basic and often inappropriate information from the web. When the initial task is completed, pupils are asked to select another country and complete a similar exercise which is equally undemanding.
- Assessment is insecure because teachers lack the subject expertise to apply judgements to subject criteria accurately.
- Geography frequently provides a context for work in literacy. When pupils have opportunities to write non-fiction accounts or write persuasively the focus on literacy does not always complement learning in geography.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is inadequate.

- The current geography curriculum is fragmented and there is a lack of progression in learning, especially at Key Stage 2. Pupils experience episodes of geography which rarely build on previous learning. Teacher planning does identify some coverage but it is difficult to identify how

pupils progress in their knowledge and understanding as they move through Key Stage 2. Often pupils in Year 3/4 cover similar work on similar topics as Year 5/6 with similar outcomes.

- Some aspects of the curriculum, such as sustainability, are covered adequately through issues linked to deforestation of tropical rainforests and climate change. However, studies of places lack depth and issues linked to physical processes, diversity and interdependence are not delivered in a cohesive way.
- Pupils gain some experience of their immediate outdoor environment in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 linked to visits in the local area and through Forest School work. Some basic fieldwork skills are developed through a litter survey in local woodland which enables pupils to put forward suggestions on how to improve their environment. These experiences are not built on in Key Stage 2.
- Map work is covered on a regular basis. Pupils learn how to draw a simple route map and are aware of the importance of landmarks and how to use atlases. Pupils are less familiar, however, with Ordnance Survey maps.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is satisfactory.

- The subject leader has audited provision and is aware of areas of weakness which require development. This has resulted in improvements in Key Stage 1 where provision is most secure. Weaknesses at Key Stage 2 have not been addressed but have been identified as a priority for future development.
- Geography has not been a priority for whole-school improvement as the school has correctly focused resources on improving levels of literacy and numeracy.
- Resources to support improvement in the subject and teacher expertise are inadequate. Although some atlases have been purchased, there are currently insufficient quality subject-specific resources to support teachers who are non-specialists, to deliver the subject with confidence.
- The training, resources and support provided by the subject associations have not been used to improve teacher expertise or support learning in the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving teaching and the curriculum, especially at Key Stage 2, by:
 - providing more opportunities for greater in-depth study of places
 - making sure that fieldwork and outdoor-learning opportunities are planned for and made available to all year groups
 - ensuring that key concepts such as physical processes, interdependence and diversity are covered in sufficient detail

- making sure that planning enables pupils to make good progress as they move through the school to improve attainment by the time they complete Year 6
 - using resources, such as Google Earth and video, more effectively to better secure geographical learning
- using the support and resources provided by the subject associations to improve teacher expertise and raise standards in 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

Leszek Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector