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Mrs J McCutcheon
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Dear Mrs McCutcheon

Ofsted survey inspection programme - Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 22 March 2007 to look at work in geography.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the emphasis placed on the global dimension of the subject.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with the headteacher, the subject co-ordinator and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of a lesson.

The overall effectiveness of geography was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Many pupils enter the school with standards in literacy that are well below the national average and this clearly hinders their rapid progress in geography.
- By the end of Year 6 many pupils approach, and a few exceed, the national expectations in geography, indicating at least satisfactory progress for these pupils.

- Those pupils with very low literacy levels make considerably slower progress and achievement is barely satisfactory for this group of pupils.
- Pupils are developing some skills of geographical enquiry, which are helped considerably when pupils use the computer.
- Behaviour is well managed, both in the classrooms and around the school, with pupils showing respect for one another and their teachers. This was poignantly reflected when a Year 3 pupil spontaneously supported a classmate with learning difficulties, and encouraged him to contribute successfully to the group's work.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- In a number of classes, teaching remains too tied to worksheets and provides, in many cases, infrequent opportunities to write freely and creatively. Where pupils are given this freedom, better work is produced, giving pupils a chance to develop their literacy skills, such as in their work on rivers.
- Pupils have a reasonable understanding of their local area but are much less secure about other locations in the United Kingdom and abroad.
- A well-structured lesson was observed, providing pupils with an opportunity to collaborate in groups.
- A greater focus on literacy through geography and a wider range of visual stimuli is needed. Too many incorrectly spelt geographical words are missed in teachers' marking and pupils are often not given clear enough direction on how to improve their work.
- Assessment is currently being deliberated and a sensible approach to this is being considered.
- A residential visit for Year 6 has stimulated much discussion and pupils have used their skills in information and communication technology to produce a computer presentation of a local river. They were justifiably proud and excited about the visit and this work.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is inadequate.

- Too little geography appears in the overall curriculum provision in comparison with other humanities subjects such as history and religious education.
- Of the geography topics being studied, there are too few opportunities for pupils to look at distant places and sustainability is insufficiently dealt with.
- Apart from the Year 6 local residential visit, which contributes significantly to pupils' geographical understanding of their region, there is a lack of fieldwork or visits to support the subject.

Leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory.

- A detailed policy exists to support geography and a sensible approach has been taken to manage subject co-ordination in this school with a limited number of teachers.
- The subject is monitored on a rolling cycle with other subjects but specific observations of geography lessons have been too infrequent to identify gaps in geography provision.

Subject issue: The global dimension

Children's learning about the global dimension is inadequate.

- This aspect of geography is considerably underdeveloped. Pupils have only very limited experience of other countries and little attention is paid to factors such as interdependence or global sustainability.
- Pupils do collect for charities providing funds to support a water supply in Bolivia and goats in southern Asia but these areas of the world are not then developed as geographical topics.

Areas for improvement

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include the need to:

- increase the amount of geography studied, including greater opportunities for fieldwork and studying other countries around the world
- reduce the reliance on worksheets in geography and provide more opportunities for creative writing within the subject
- provide pupils with more specific feedback on their work with a clearer focus on what they must do to improve
- consider carefully the approaches taken in geography lessons to support literacy.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Jenny Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector