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30 July 2007

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Dear Mrs Lister

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 06 July 2007 to look at work in geography.

The visit provided much useful evidence which will contribute to national evaluation and reporting in geography. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions, but individual institutions will not be named 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 staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of data, analysis of pupils' work and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory and improving.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall.

- Standards are broadly average by the end of Year 2 and Year 6.
- Pupils make satisfactory progress from their overall average attainment on entry to the school. Recent improvements to the quality of teaching in Key Stage 2 are bringing a faster rate of progress. However, the impact of these changes has not yet secured higher standards overall.
- In Key Stage 1, pupils have a satisfactory knowledge of the topics that they have been studying, which they demonstrate orally and in lessons. However, they have little opportunity to show their learning by recording their work.
- In Key Stage 2, pupils accurately recall information about the physical and human features of the topics they have been studying, showing

familiarity with different types of information. They have a good breadth of knowledge but they are less secure at providing reasons or offering explanations for the links between places and processes. They carry out investigations but lack independence in the use of these skills.

- Although there are more demanding pieces of writing set from time to time, this is often in the context of English lessons. Teachers mark these pieces for their technical accuracy rather than for their geographical qualities. This limits the potential benefits to pupils' progress in their geographical understanding.
- Pupils' personal development is good. They enjoy their work, have good attitudes to learning, and collaborate well. They generally take care with the presentation of their work. Their behaviour is very good.
- Pupils are interested in geography, especially when learning is based on practical activities such as the work arising from fieldwork. They enjoy the opportunities to respond to the use of the interactive white board by their teacher and to take part in problem solving activities.

The quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

Although predominantly good teaching was seen in Key Stage 2, this has not yet brought about consistently good progress across the key stage.

- Lessons are based on very good relationships and positive expectations for learning.
- Lessons are planned in detail and a good range of resources is utilised. The interactive whiteboard is generally well used. As a result, pupils are motivated to learn and sustain their interest throughout lessons.
- Teachers identify learning objectives and share these clearly with pupils. However, objectives are not always sharply defined enough to check accurately how far pupils' have progressed in their skills and understanding.
- Teachers have a sound knowledge of the requirements of the topics they are teaching overall. However, their subject expertise varies and this affects the degree of confidence shown in their planning, in the explanations they provide, and in the questions they ask. Sometimes this variable confidence affects the timing of different parts of the lesson, as teachers are unsure what pupils will find easy or find difficult.
- Teachers mark work regularly and follow the school policy. Although there are examples of good marking, there are inconsistencies in the quality of guidance pupils receive. The assessment of the work pupils do in different topics is not made against specific geographical criteria. Hence, there is not an accurate view about the extent of the progress that pupils make in geography for planning or reporting purposes.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- It satisfactorily incorporates national units of work and encourages links to be made with other subjects.
- There are short and medium term plans for each unit of work. However, as the school acknowledges, the actual coverage of these plans varies from class to class.
- All aspects of geography receive some attention but the balance of knowledge and skills taught is not even in each year or across the school. There is a lot of map work but little fieldwork. The degree of challenge in the planned activities is not consistent across the key stages.
- The potential links to be made between different aspects of the units of work is not realised. For example, the 'continuous units', intended to be taught across a year, are taught as separate units.

Subject leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory and improving.

- The school has had a succession of subject leaders over recent years which have impeded the development of the subject.
- There have been few opportunities for professional development. This is partly due to the limited availability of support for subject development in the local area.
- A newly appointed deputy headteacher has undertaken a rigorous review of provision which has established a very clear view of what needs to be done to take the school forward. This correctly includes an overhaul of the existing curriculum.
- A new policy has been prepared which provides the basis for a more coherent and challenging curriculum to be implemented. It is informed by a good understanding of the nature of geography and how pupils' progress can be accelerated.

Subject issue

Pupils' learning within geography about the global dimension is satisfactory.

- There are sufficient opportunities within the geography curriculum to explore global themes so that pupils have a sound awareness of a range of issues. For example, they are familiar with aspects of climate change and about the impact of natural disasters. Topical issues such as flooding are discussed. Good links are sometimes made between whole school initiatives such as fund raising for deserving overseas causes.

- The school lacks a strategic approach to developing the global dimension further; as a consequence pupils have a limited understanding about issues such as world poverty, diversity and overseas aid.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in geography is good.

- Teachers show good awareness of the needs of pupils with learning difficulties, providing additional support if required. Pupils also receive positive support from teaching assistants so that they can successfully access the curriculum.
- Learning activities generally provide opportunities for pupils of all abilities to succeed.

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

- ensure that teaching consistently challenges pupils' learning to accelerate progress
- improve the curriculum as planned, including provision for the global dimension, in order to ensure progression in all areas of the subject across the school
- improve assessment procedures in order to provide better guidance to pupils on how to improve their work and to assist the school in knowing overall strengths and weaknesses in learning.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop geography in the school. As explained in my previous letter, a copy of this feedback will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be made available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Ralph Higgs
Additional Inspector