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Mrs Cork
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Dear Mrs Cork

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 18 September 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 focus on the school's response to 'Excellence and Enjoyment' and its impact on provision in geography, particularly in terms of planning and progression.

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 staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of data, analysis of pupils' work and observation of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- By the end of Key Stage 2, standards are broadly average.
- The progress that pupils make is satisfactory, taking account of their capability and their broadly average attainment on entry to the school.

- Pupils' knowledge of the places and themes they have studied is satisfactory. For example, pupils in Years 1 and 2 accurately describe some features of the local area and of several places further afield. They clearly show a growing awareness of the wider world. Year 6 pupils are able to pose and answer questions about the use and conservation of water. They make thoughtful comparisons between the lives of people in a less developed country and their own, showing an understanding of the geographical factors which influence these differences.
- Pupils can use geographical sources of evidence for their investigations but these skills are less well developed than their knowledge of the topics they have studied.
- Pupils actively participate in discussions in geography lessons, collaborating well together. They take care with the presentation of their work. Their behaviour is very good.
- Pupils have positive attitudes towards geography. They particularly enjoy investigating environmental issues and doing research using computers.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Although some good teaching was seen in both key stages, this has not yet brought about consistently good progress across the school.
- Teachers prepare their lessons well choosing a variety of interesting resources. Lessons are built on very good relationships.
- Teachers identify learning objectives and share these with pupils. However, these objectives are not always defined sharply enough to check accurately how far pupils have progressed in their understanding and skills.
- Teachers have a sound knowledge of the topics they are teaching. However, their subject expertise varies and this affects the precision and challenge of the questions they ask.
- Pupils are provided with a good range of opportunities to learn, involving individual, pair and group work. Teaching assistants provide valuable support.
- Teacher's mark pupils' work conscientiously but their comments are usually too general and do not guide pupils about how to improve. Pupils comment that they are not clear about how well they are doing.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum plan makes use of national units of work to create a teaching programme that satisfactorily meets pupils' needs.

- Teachers make modifications to these units to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the surrounding rural area, the school's links with the community, and topical issues.
- Opportunities for fieldwork are good. Pupils participate in residential experiences in Year 5 and Year 6.
- The assessments done at the end of the units of work are not used effectively to adjust future planning. There is no mechanism to exemplify the National Curriculum levels that pupils are working towards in geography to assist teachers in judging standards and where to pitch the challenge of their lessons.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are satisfactory.

- Taking account of the large number of responsibilities carried by the subject leader, there is satisfactory co-ordination of geography.
- The curriculum has been appropriately resourced and the long-term plan recently modified.
- There is a suitable geography action plan which is set within a new rolling programme for monitoring and review. This has correctly identified the need to monitor pupils' learning systematically.
- The lack of subject specific support has meant that the geography subject leader has had few opportunities for professional development.

Subject issue

The impact of curriculum planning on progression and the quality of provision in geography is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is soundly planned to meet national requirements.
- There is a long-term plan which is supported by medium term plans for each unit of work. However, the content of these plans has not been recently reviewed in detail.
- The sequence of the units in the plan is adjusted appropriately to take account of changes to the composition of mixed-age classes. However, pupils report that there are occasional examples where they repeat some of the work they have done before.
- Teachers make some links between geography and the work pupils are doing in literacy and information communication technology but the extent and quality of these links depend on the creativity of the individual teacher.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in geography is satisfactory overall.

- Pupils with learning difficulties are well supported by teaching assistants.
- Teachers provide work which is suitable for the wide differences in age and ability in their classes. However, pupils that are more able require more challenge in some of the tasks set.

Areas for improvement

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

- ensure that teaching consistently challenges pupils' learning so that their progress is accelerated
- improve the curriculum in order to ensure consistent 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.

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 the next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Ralph Higgs
Additional inspector