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Mrs Siedle
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Dear Mrs Siedle

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 19 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 how this is impacting 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 five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Standards are above average by the end of Year 2 and Year 6. The very large majority of pupils are reaching the national expectation at the end of both key stages and some are working at a higher level.

- Pupils make good progress from their overall average attainment on entry to the school and achieve well.
- Year 2 pupils investigate their local area and record their findings in different ways. They also have a growing awareness of the wider world. For example, they comment on the different routes they could take to visit Egypt, showing an understanding of the advantages of different modes of transport.
- Year 6 have a good understanding of the geographical processes at work along the River Tees, and use technical vocabulary accurately. They use a good range of skills to help them investigate different places. They are beginning to offer explanations for some of the processes they have studied such as the impact of different environments on settlement patterns.
- Pupils' personal development is good. They enjoy their work, have good attitudes to learning, and collaborate well. They take good care with the presentation of their work. Their behaviour is very good.
- Pupils are very interested in geography. They enjoy the different activities provided for them. Older pupils comment that geography is fun and the way that teachers organise topics helps them understand the links with other subjects.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching is good.

- Lessons are based on very good relationships and high expectations for learning. Lessons are planned in detail and a good range of resources are utilised. The interactive whiteboard is used well to display resources and to help make learning easier.
- Teachers identify learning objectives and share these clearly with pupils. The recent introduction of key skills check lists are a useful aid to planning and keep lessons focused on geographical outcomes.
- Whilst learning activities take account of the needs of all abilities, on occasions opportunities are missed to stretch the most able.
- Pupils enjoy learning because there is a good variety of activities and their teachers are enthusiastic. They readily work together and discuss points as they arise, sustaining their interest throughout lessons. They appreciate the use of 'learning maps' which set out expectations for learning across the topic.
- Teachers have a secure knowledge of the requirements of the topics they are teaching. This is partly because of the good level of joint planning which exists both within and across year groups.
- Marking in geography is satisfactory. Although there are examples of good marking, there are inconsistencies in the quality of guidance pupils receive.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum meets pupils' needs well as it is successfully planned to be relevant and enjoyable. A series of common themes, such as 'Egypt' and 'the Environment', which combine several subjects including geography as 'lead subjects', give geography learning a high profile in the school and encourage a positive response from pupils and their families.
- A careful planning and review process ensures that pupils follow a coherent scheme which meets national requirements.
- An emerging strong feature is that the geography curriculum is planned not only in relation to the places and themes to be studied but also the key skills which will be acquired. Consequently there is a clear emphasis on literacy, numeracy and the use of information communication technology (ICT).
- When geography is not a 'lead subject' in the whole school topic, more consideration should be given to its role and purpose.
- Although assessment opportunities are planned into each topic, the school recognises that National Curriculum levels have not been exemplified to guide staff in judging standards.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- There are good subject leadership and management systems in place which have allowed the relatively new post holder to build well on the existing good practice. These systems include the good support of an experienced team leader as a mentor.
- There is a good emphasis on providing good curriculum leadership. The senior leadership team are regularly briefed on developments. The progress being made with the geography action plan is also closely monitored.
- A good feature is the subject leader's active involvement with the curriculum planning undertaken by year group teams.
- The monitoring identified for the coming year appropriately strengthens the role to be taken in evaluating pupils' learning and progress.

Subject issue

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

- The introduction over the last three years of a topic based curriculum which is followed by all classes has strongly promoted coherence and progression.
- The involvement of teachers in all classes from the Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 and 2 has encouraged a good degree of clarity about the National Curriculum expectations for learning geography.
- Good use is made of a variety of learning activities, including dance and role play, to encourage creative responses from pupils and to challenge their thinking.
- The curriculum is purposeful as overall outcomes are agreed through a robust planning process and are particular to the school and the needs of its pupils.
- Pupils enjoy the depth of learning that the common topics provide and this strongly promotes their good progress.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in geography is good overall.

- 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 although the most able require greater challenge in some of the tasks set.

Areas for improvement

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

- further refine the curriculum, giving particular consideration to the learning in geography when it is a 'support subject'
- ensure that the most able pupils receive consistent challenge to stretch their learning
- complete the assessment portfolio of pupils' work so that teachers have a fuller understanding of the standards expected at each national curriculum level.

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