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Mrs Shannon
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Shannon

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 08 October 2007 to look at work in geography.

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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Standards are below average by the end of Key Stages 1 and 2.
- Pupils make broadly satisfactory but uneven progress from their low starting points on entry to the school.
- Pupils soundly recall information about the recent work that they have completed but they are not confident about the work covered in

previous terms. Although this demonstrates that some aspects of their knowledge and understanding are broadly satisfactory, some aspects, such as their knowledge of location, are relatively weak.

- Pupils in Year 2, for example, have difficulty in accurately identifying features on a map of the British Isles. Although pupils in the Year 5/6 class have a recent grounding in aspects of mapping such as direction and grid references, their knowledge of places and understanding of physical processes studied in the previous class is patchy.
- Whilst pupils use different geographical resources for enquiry, they lack independence in posing and answering questions and are hesitant when participating in discussions. In a Year 2 lesson, for example, pupils were heavily dependent on their teacher for guidance when drawing a pictorial map of the story of Handa's Surprise.
- Pupils' behaviour is good and they respond well to learning activities due to the positive relationships that exist in classrooms. They readily work together in pairs and groups.
- Pupils show interest in the work they do in geography. They comment that they enjoy opportunities for problem solving, using Information Communication Technology (ICT) for research and for presenting their work, and would like to do more of these kinds of activities.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching is uneven but is satisfactory overall.

- Teachers make learning objectives clear in their planning and share these with pupils at the start of lessons. However, these are not always sharply defined enough to enable progress to be accurately measured and for pupils to understand how well they are doing.
- Lessons are carefully prepared and planned using resources which interest pupils and promote learning. Sometimes, however, lessons do not demand enough of pupils to apply their geographical knowledge or to extend their skills. This slows the rate of progress.
- The school has recognised weaknesses in pupils' independent learning. Lesson observations in Key Stage 2 showed that changes to teaching methods are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' enquiry skills and their confidence in suggesting and explaining ideas.
- Lessons which require pupils to think hard and which engage them all in making a contribution lead to a faster rate of progress.
- These better lessons have been successfully influenced by the recent introduction of 'thinking skills' strategies into Key Stage 2. For example, Year 5/6 pupils acquired good insights into sustainability when brainstorming ideas about the industrial production of an item of convenience food.
- The quality of marking of pupils' work is variable. Whilst some marking gives clear pointers to where improvements should be made, other marking is less effective and only gives general praise.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory and improving.

- Pupils study a soundly balanced programme of geography which meets statutory requirements.
- The school has introduced a new rolling programme of topics to better match pupils needs. This provides an improved emphasis on studying environmental issues and global education.
- A good feature is the introduction of opportunities to learn geography throughout each year by following 'continuous units', such as 'geography in the news'. This stimulates interest and extends pupils' knowledge of places and physical processes.
- A new approach to planning each unit of work has been introduced which focuses on identifying learning outcomes. This is helping ensure that national requirements are more closely aligned to pupils' needs.
- There is also a firmer emphasis on learning the skills of geographical enquiry in these planned topics.
- The provision for fieldwork is uneven across the school. Although the school rightly emphasises the need to extend pupils' experience beyond the local area, not enough advantage is taken of the visits which occur in each class to develop geographical understanding.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good and are bringing about improvements.

- Subject leadership is enthusiastic and well supported by managerial systems which the new headteacher has established.
- There are good systems in place for checking the quality of provision in the context of this small school which has identified areas for improvement. For example, the assessments which teachers carry out at the end of each unit of work have been carefully analysed to help identify aspects of learning that need attention.
- A suitable action plan has been established which is being implemented vigorously. It is beginning to have a positive effect on the quality of learning.
- Recent co-operation with local schools has brought benefits to the curriculum and contributed to subject development.
- The subject leader has had limited opportunity for subject specific professional development, partly because of the absence of external support networks.

Subject issue

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

- Recent changes to the long-term curriculum plan have been made in order to bring about greater challenge and enjoyment to learning geography. These improvements are at an early stage of development.
- The plan takes account of the mixed-age composition of some classes to ensure that pupils do not repeat work unnecessarily.
- Teachers are beginning to plan opportunities to link geography to work in other subjects, such as literacy, history and ICT.
- Good links are being forged to aid transition to the next stage of education from Foundation Stage to Year 1 and from Year 6 to Year 7.
- The school has rightly recognised that older pupils have not gained a progressive understanding of some aspects of geography and is taking steps to ensure good coverage of requirements in each age group.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in geography is satisfactory.

- Teachers mostly plan activities which take account of the learning needs of different ability and age groups of pupils in their class.
- The recent use of 'thinking skills' strategies in Key Stage 2 is encouraging greater participation in lesson activities as pupils gain confidence in making contributions.
- Teaching assistants provide good support for individuals and small groups that have learning difficulties.

Areas for improvement

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

- ensure that teachers provide more consistent challenge to bring about faster overall progress
- establish an assessment portfolio that will provide teachers with further support on age-related standards to assist them with planning the progress that pupils need to make
- ensure that the curriculum enables pupils to progressively build on the knowledge and skills acquired in previous work.

As I explained 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