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Dear Mrs Monkman

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 01 October 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 two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- By the end of Key Stages 1 and 2, standards are above average. A high proportion 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 across the school and achieve well.
- Year 2 pupils have a good awareness of the wider world and have an impressive grasp of geographical vocabulary with which to describe places both within the locality and further away. They have good skills with which to consider secondary sources such as photographs and maps and name and securely locate major features.
- Year 6 pupils use atlases and globes to securely identify major physical features. They show a good understanding of the relationship between physical features, climate and human activity when considering mountain and other environments. They are also acquiring a good understanding of the impact of human activity on the environment and what can be done to protect it.
- These older pupils can combine a range of secondary sources, including information communication technology materials when investigating activities such as mountaineering and are able to use technical vocabulary accurately.
- Pupils' personal development is very good. They are inquisitive about the world around them and enjoy learning geography a great deal. In lessons they confidently participate in discussions and work together very effectively. Their behaviour is very good indeed.

#### Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers have high expectations for the learning and behaviour of their pupils and a good pace is struck in lessons.
- Teachers take care to consider pupils' different learning needs when preparing their detailed lesson plans. An impressive feature is the emphasis in lessons on engaging pupils in learning by using a variety of techniques. These vary from invigorating pupils through the use of 'brain-gym' to the use of 'mind-maps' to capture their ideas as learning unfolds.
- Learning objectives are clearly identified and shared with pupils, and kept in mind throughout the lesson.
- Teachers are good at asking questions and listening to answers and this gives pupils the confidence to make suggestions and to speculate. This contributes well to the development of pupils' enquiry skills.
- A good range of resources is used effectively to promote learning. In one particularly good lesson in Year 2 the imaginative use of resources, including a phone-call to an 'inhabitant' of a Scottish island brought great excitement and very productive questions from all pupils.
- Marking is satisfactory. Although there are examples of good marking, there are some inconsistencies in the quality of guidance pupils receive. Consequently, pupils are unclear about how well they are doing in geography.

- Although pupils' attainment in each topic is assessed on its completion, the school recognises that this process could be further strengthened. The recent emphasis on developing extended writing has brought greater awareness of the need to utilise national curriculum levels to guide staff in judging standards and provide better feedback to pupils

### 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. It meets national requirements.
- Teachers are using the flexibility they have been given by the school to make some good links with other subjects, although this feature is at an early stage of development.
- Careful planning of the timetable allows pupils to study geography topics in depth across a whole afternoon session. As the sequence of lessons is planned in detail, pupils benefit considerably from this approach, as shown by their accurate and detailed recall of information.
- The school is using its 'eco-school' status to promote environmental awareness effectively amongst all pupils. It also takes the opportunities afforded by global and local events to make links with geographical learning.
- Pupils have satisfactory opportunities to take part in fieldwork.

### Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- As you are also the subject leader, geography has a high profile in the school and there is a good understanding evident of the contribution the subject makes to the whole curriculum and to pupils' personal development.
- The school has an accurate understanding of its strengths and where it needs to continue to improve. There is a clear and appropriate action plan. Good use is made of 'learning walks' to focus on particular aspects of learning.
- Improvements, such as providing greater challenge in the writing activities set across the school are being implemented vigorously.

### Subject issue

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

- The curriculum is purposeful as it is planned in detail and with a generally good understanding of expected learning outcomes. Although national units of work are used to structure the long-term plan, each is varied to take account of the school's emphasis on 'Excellence and Enjoyment'. This means that pupils respond well to the good range of learning opportunities that are provided.
- The decisions to afford teachers flexibility and to encourage an adventurous approach to explore links with other subjects have brought benefits, and geography is no longer taught in isolation. However, a review has not been undertaken of the effects these changes have had on the overall coherence of the curriculum.
- The emphasis on improving the quality of writing in the subject has contributed to an improved understanding amongst teachers of the expected progression in knowledge and understanding of the subject. It has also raised important questions about the role of different kinds of writing and recording across the range of expected skills and knowledge. This has provided the school with a good platform for further improvement.

## Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in geography is good.

- The learning activities provided provide good opportunities for pupils of all abilities to succeed. Teaching methods such as the use of group work and discussion pairs ensure that all pupils are encouraged to participate. The ethos for learning established in the school encourages pupils to ask as well as answer questions.
- Teachers quickly provide additional support if pupils are struggling to understand a topic. They also display good awareness of the needs of pupils with learning difficulties.
- Pupils receive well-focused support from teaching assistants so that they can successfully make progress with their work.

## Areas for improvement

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

- review the impact of recent curriculum developments in order to ensure that coherence is maintained and that pupils learn progressively across all aspects of the subject
- improve assessment so that pupils can be given more accurate and effective guidance 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