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Miss J Matthiae
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Dear Miss Matthiae

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 24 January 2008 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 three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are both satisfactory.

- Most pupils make steady gains in their learning and make satisfactory progress in developing their skills, knowledge and understanding in geography. By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils reach standards in line with national expectations.

- In Years 3 and 4, pupils have a satisfactory knowledge of places they have studied. They have an increased understanding of the British Isles and can identify the features of rivers and canals using appropriate geographical vocabulary. The visit to Kings Norton canal supports this work appropriately. Pupils are able to design simple maps, recognise some human and physical features in their locality and are aware through their study of St Lucia and other places that the world extends beyond their locality.
- By the end of Key Stage 2, most pupils demonstrate satisfactory knowledge of work they have studied and when given the opportunity can write about this in some detail. They have increased their understanding of weather and climates. The study of Birmingham consolidates previous learning of location and land use. Map skills are appropriately developed with the use of different types of maps and aerial photographs.
- Pupils generally are keen and interested in their work. Their behaviour is good and they respond well to clear classroom expectations. Relationships between adults and pupils are good.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching is satisfactory with good features.

- Most lessons observed had a good pace and teachers' subject knowledge was good. There was a clear structure and a variety of teaching and learning approaches were used. These were carefully selected to build on previous learning and extend pupils' thinking. However, pupils' work shows that this does not always occur in geography lessons.
- Planning is thorough and appropriate resources are selected to engage pupils. Good use is made of learning objectives to ensure that pupils clearly understand what they are expected to learn in the lesson.
- Pupils are given some opportunities to work in small groups, pairs and individually, ensuring access to a variety of learning techniques. Pupils respond well to these opportunities.
- Scrutiny of work shows that much of the work set is similar for many pupils. There is a high reliance on work sheets, particularly in Years 3 and 4 with limited opportunities for extended geography writing throughout the school. Higher attaining pupils, in particular, are often insufficiently challenged which prevents them from making better progress.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly and most teachers give clear guidance about what pupils need to do next to improve. Work is neatly presented in the main, especially in Years 5 and 6 where pupils are offered increased opportunities to record their work independently.
- Good opportunities are provided for pupils to self assess their work. Assessment is focused at the end of each year and outcomes shared in reports to parents. However, it is not currently used effectively by teachers to build on pupils' prior skills and increase rates of progress.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The geography curriculum has appropriate breadth and balance. However, less than the recommended time is taught in the school. As a result, some themes are not covered in sufficient depth in some classes. This does not allow pupils to develop or extend their skills, knowledge and understanding beyond a satisfactory level.
- Pupils have an adequate knowledge of global issues but do not fully understand their complexity because there is insufficient emphasis on environmental change and sustainable development in the curriculum. Although the school has been awarded the Eco-Schools bronze award to recognise the school's achievement in working towards a sustainable lifestyle, issues such as recycling and climate change have not been explored in sufficient detail in geography lessons.
- Pupils use an appropriate range of Information and Communication Technology resources such as using the internet and programmable robots to support their learning.
- Fieldwork experiences around the school, Sarehole Mill and Bockleton are highly valued and contribute positively to the subject and pupils' learning. However, pupils' fieldwork skills are basic for their age. Opportunities are not always taken to use field work and real examples within the immediate locality to motivate and inspire pupils.
- Some interesting geography displays and key vocabulary in classrooms help enhance the planned curriculum and are used appropriately by pupils to promote their learning.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are satisfactory.

- Development of the subject has been limited in recent years while other whole school priorities have been addressed.
- In the absence of a subject leader for geography, a senior teacher has assumed responsibility for the subject and has developed it well during this period.
- Good current proposals are in place to adapt and modify the curriculum and these figure highly in the school improvement plan. They provide a good starting point for future development. The school has a geography policy but it is in need of review.
- The school does not have an accurate picture of the themes studied in the main feeder infant school and as a result cannot build progressively on this work.

Subject issue

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

- Planning in the long and medium term currently ensures an appropriate range of geographical enquiry leading to satisfactory progression throughout the school.
- The school has made a good start in modifying and adapting the geography curriculum. This carefully links with other subjects in a curriculum map designed to build progressively on the development of pupils' skills.
- Proposals are well advanced in collaboration with the neighbouring infant school to create an environmental learning centre which should help support and promote sustainable development in both schools.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in geography is satisfactory overall.

- In lessons seen work was matched to the needs of pupils, with boys and girls having equal access.
- Teachers provide appropriate support and challenge which helps pupils make at least satisfactory progress. Pupils with learning difficulties are generally well supported by learning support assistants.
- In books, little adaptation of work was seen: work was generally pitched towards the majority and more able pupils in particular were not sufficiently challenged by some of the tasks set.
- Pupils from minority ethnic groups make satisfactory progress in their geography lessons.

Areas for improvement

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

- continue to review the curriculum and link subjects together where appropriate to make geography even more interesting, relevant and enjoyable for pupils
- develop the global dimension in order to increase pupils' knowledge and understanding about issues affecting their environment
- develop assessment practices which effectively track pupils' progress and help receiving teachers build on pupils' prior skills to increase rates of progress
- review and update the geography policy.

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

Paul Weston
Her Majesty's Inspector