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Ms S Crowson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Ms Crowson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 29 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 displays around the school, and three lessons.

The effectiveness of provision in geography is inconsistent across the school and is inadequate overall although there are also pockets of outstanding practice.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in geography are currently both inadequate overall.

- The context of the school has a significant impact on learning in the subject. All pupils come from ethnic minority groups and almost all

of these pupils have English as a second language. Acquisition of English is understandably a priority.

- Pupils make inconsistent progress in their acquisition of geographical understanding and skills as they move through the school. This in part reflects the mixed quality of the teaching of geography and the variable access to the geography curriculum across classes.
- In the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, pupils begin to familiarise themselves with their local environment and begin to use basic geographical vocabulary through regular use of the immediate outdoor environment.
- Although pupils make good progress in Year 6 due to some excellent and challenging teaching, this cannot fully compensate for poorer progress in their learning about geography lower down the school.
- Geographical, especially mapwork, skills, are better developed than knowledge and understanding about places and geographical concepts. Where learning is good in Year 6, there is a clear focus on ensuring pupils are confident in using geographical resources such as maps and aerial photographs, but elsewhere many pupils are unclear about what an atlas is or is used for.
- There are good relationships in classrooms. Pupils are polite, respectful and welcoming. They especially enjoy those opportunities when they can work collaboratively and provide each other with mutual support.

### Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching and learning of geography is inconsistent across the school but is inadequate overall.

- Teachers have good generic teaching skills, but for most their subject knowledge is weak and they remain insecure or unclear about what constitutes good learning in geography.
- Where outcomes are least successful, pupils are occupied by tasks rather than challenged. Many tasks set often require simplistic responses and do not progressively build on previous work.
- Teachers frequently 'cherry pick' those aspects of the curriculum they feel most comfortable and secure with. As a result pupils' learning in geography can become disjointed and in some classes little geography is actually taught. For example, in studying litter in the local area, the context may have been geographical but evidence from pupils' outcomes showed that very little geography was learnt.
- Where the teaching was outstanding, the sequence of lessons and activities was well planned to ensure progressive learning and acquisition of skills in geography. High quality questioning involved all pupils, and opportunities to discuss collaboratively allowed pupils to reflect and added depth to their learning. In such lessons there is good

interaction between teacher and pupils and a strong emphasis on pupils learning through discovery and enquiry.

- Assessment is acknowledged as an area which needs further development. Pupils' work is marked and commented on but few teachers provide geography-specific guidance for pupils to be able to understand what they need to do to improve in the subject.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The scheme of work ensures coverage and meets requirements. The school is conscious of the need to personalise national units of work to meet both the specific requirements of pupils and the context of the school and the locality.
- Planning for teaching geography can be inconsistent. Evidence from discussions with pupils and scrutiny of their work identified that teachers are selective in what they teach and as a result pupils do not get a cohesive experience in geography.
- The school utilises the local area and there are frequent visits to Castleshaw. However, on these visits geography is frequently the context for learning in other subjects notably history and science. Currently, the potential for using these visits to learn geography is not fully exploited.
- The school encourages pupils to reflect on their cultural heritage well. Pupils speak with some confidence about Saudi Arabia or the Indian sub-continent. The focus is often about customs, culture or religion and less on the geography of the places many pupils have personally visited. Pupils' awareness of the world is very narrow and for many their place within the European community is also unclear.
- Displays around the school celebrate diversity, reflect the school's eco-status and how the school is promoting sustainability or highlight the international links which are being established. As yet, these activities are not sufficiently reflected in the planning of the taught curriculum.

### Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are currently unsatisfactory.

- As headteacher, you have recognised the need to improve provision in this and other foundation subjects. As a result, you have recently personally taken over management of the subject. Geography has had a low priority previously and the changes you are currently initiating have not yet had time to impact on provision.
- Teachers subject knowledge is weak because there have been very few opportunities to participate in subject-specific training to improve their confidence and expertise in teaching geography.

- In the past, there has been insufficient quality monitoring of provision in the subject to facilitate the identification of issues teachers were having difficulties with, and enable relevant support to be provided.
- The school has not utilised the support and resources available through subject associations to improve provision in the subject.

### Subject issue

The impact of curriculum planning on progression and the quality of provision in geography is inadequate at the moment.

- The current teaching programme ensures coverage of the key topics. Since the focus is on content rather than outcomes the progressive development of skills, knowledge and understanding is not clearly identified.
- The lack of cohesion in what is taught across the school has hampered pupils' learning in geography.
- The school has identified the need to revise planning as a priority and has experimented successfully with pilot planning in Year 6. This has had a positive impact on the quality of provision for those pupils. The intention is to review the planning throughout the school in the light of the positive impact in Year 6 and the lessons learned.

### Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in geography is good.

- Effective use is made of teaching assistants to support specific pupils with needs in geography lessons.
- Teachers know their pupils well and are quick to provide them with support if they have a difficulty, especially where these are linked to language.
- All pupils are taught in mixed ability classes with boys and girls having equal access. In the best lessons, questioning is widely distributed and involves all pupils.

### Areas for improvement

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

- develop the curriculum to make sure it is both relevant to pupils and ensures the progressive development of learning in geography
- use support and resources from subject associations to build up teachers' confidence, to enable them to teach the subject more effectively
- improve the monitoring of provision in geography to ensure that the curriculum is being taught well and that learning is of a high quality

- utilise the links being established with schools in distant localities to personalise the curriculum and improve learning about distant places.

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

Leszek Iwaskow  
Her Majesty's Inspector  
Specialist Adviser for Geography