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Mr G Nott
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Dear Mr Nott

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 31 January 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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are both good.

- Pupils' overall standards are above national expectations with a majority of pupils working at higher standards for their ages. For example, Year 4 pupils' produced detailed comparisons of schools in England and southern India, and Year 6 pupils' showed good knowledge and understanding of river processes and the causes of flooding.

- Pupils' achievement is good because of the effective teaching, good use of assessment, well planned curriculum, and pupils' desire to do well.
- Occasionally, pupils devise and then answer their own questions. They often have to find things out for themselves but this is usually within a structure provided by the teacher. Pupils have insufficient opportunities for more open enquiries when they can use their initiative and develop more of their own ideas.
- Pupils' exemplary personal development contributes to their good achievement. They are very well behaved and keen to learn. For example when a Year 3 class was told the main task in a lesson, there was an audible buzz of excitement.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching is good.

- Lessons are well planned, interactive whiteboards are used to show some eye-catching photos and video, and talk partners and group work are used effectively. Teachers respond sensitively to pupils' errors and use them to take learning forward.
- Teachers add good ongoing assessment notes to their lesson plans and are encouraging pupils to assess their own learning.
- Lessons often include interesting and enjoyable activities such as practical investigations of the permeability of different surfaces as part of work on flooding.
- Pupils' geographical learning is supported effectively by their good literacy and numeracy skills, and their enthusiasm to learn.
- Teachers mark work regularly and this marking includes comments about pupils' achievement. However, teachers' marking rarely gives pupils advice about how to improve their work.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good overall.

- The geography leader writes the detailed learning objectives and expected outcomes for pupils for each unit of work, and good quality, detailed lessons plans for three or four lessons in each unit.
- Year teams of teachers complete the remaining lesson plans which include matching work to pupils' differing learning needs, but details of these lessons are not available in the school's medium-term planning.
- The geography leader carries out an excellent annual evaluation of the curriculum and this is followed by improvements each summer.
- Fieldwork provision is satisfactory, and includes the strength of cross-curricular work during a Year 6 residential trip to France.

- The curriculum includes some aspects of education for sustainable development and global understanding but these are areas in need of further development.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good overall, with some very good aspects.

- The geography leader carries out an excellent annual audit which includes the evaluation of the curriculum and pupils' work. This audit leads to clear targets for improvement.
- Each year, there is a well structured geography improvement plan. Geography is a whole-school focus for improvement in 2008.
- The school has a developing partnership with a local secondary school whose geography staff have provided advice and training for all of the junior school's staff. This has already resulted in improvements to teaching, the curriculum and pupils' learning. It has also included team teaching in each Year 4 class during a special day when pupils studied Chembakolli in India.
- The substantial portfolio of pupils' work is a little unwieldy, and does not explain clearly why certain pieces of pupils' work are of a high quality.
- The school has a good capacity to further improve geography teaching and learning because its self-evaluation is accurate. It has a good track record of improvement, and this is helped by the effective support of secondary geography specialists.

Subject issue

The impact of curriculum planning on progression in geography is good.

- The school has a subject-led curriculum at present, and there are plans to develop links between subjects in 2008-9 whilst retaining the distinctive contribution of geography. Good links are made between subjects during the Year 6 French trip.
- The learning objectives and expected outcomes for pupils provide a good progression for pupils' learning, especially in their development of mapwork skills.
- Each year group studies three geography units each year, and all pupils have plenty of recorded work which provides clear evidence of good progression.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in geography is good overall.

- Different groups of pupils make similarly good progress in geography. For example, pupils with learning difficulties and those with English as an additional language were fully involved in learning in a lesson about the tropical rain forest which made good use of practical activities, discussion partners and stimulating visual material.
- As part of the school's system of lesson planning, geography work is matched to pupils' differing learning needs.
- Teachers monitor and support the progress of all pupils during lessons and teaching assistants are used effectively to support particular pupils.
- The school's ethos fosters self-confidence and a common desire to learn, and all pupils are happy to answer questions in class and to contribute to group work.

Areas for improvement

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

- ensure that pupils make good progress in developing geographical enquiry skills with more opportunities provided to show individual initiative
- refine the portfolio of pupils' assessed work so that it explains why key examples of pupils' work are of a high quality
- develop the geography curriculum's contribution to pupils' global understanding and their education for sustainable development.

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

Mike Milton
Additional Inspector