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Mr Adamson  
Headteacher  
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DH4 6AR

Dear Mr Adamson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 22 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 a geography assembly and one lesson.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are both good.

- By the end of Key Stage 2, standards are above average.
- The progress that pupils make is good, taking account of their capability and their attainment on entry to the school.
- Pupils' knowledge of the places and themes they have studied is good. For example, Key Stage 1 pupils accurately describe different human and physical features of the local area and more distant places. They

have a growing awareness of the wider world and an appropriate geographical vocabulary with which to describe it. Key Stage 2 pupils know where places are and what they are like. They have a good understanding of the geographical factors which influence their character. They can make reasoned links between aspects of the work they are doing and offer explanations, for example, about the impact of pollution on the environment.

- Pupils use a range of sources of evidence for their investigations including the internet. However, fieldwork opportunities are not consistently provided. Consequently, mapwork skills and the skills of gathering information from primary sources are less well developed than their knowledge of the topics they have studied.
- Pupils have positive attitudes towards geography because of the prominence it is given in the wider curriculum. They particularly enjoy finding out about places and the impact of world events on the lives of people and the natural environment. They are developing thoughtful moral attitudes about matters such as aid to poorer countries and the management of the environment. This is reflected in the maturity with which they share their views.
- Pupils are confident learners. They take good care with the presentation of their work and try their best to complete it. Their behaviour is very good.

### Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers plan their lessons well choosing a variety of interesting activities and resources to engage and motivate pupils. Lessons are built on very good relationships. For example, Year 3 pupils thoroughly enjoyed visiting St Lucia on 'Woodlea Airlines', taking part enthusiastically in their simulated 'journey'.
- Learning objectives are clearly identified and shared with pupils so that they have a good understanding of what they are expected to learn.
- The standard expected in pupils' work reflects high expectations and teachers' generally good appreciation of the geography curriculum.
- Effective techniques are used in lessons to check progress and to help pupils understand how well they are doing.
- Pupils experience a good variety of learning activities. They regularly use computers to help them with their work. They learn to present information in different ways, including through the use of maps, diagrams and different forms of writing.
- The same work is sometimes set for all ability groups. Despite the good help and support which pupils receive, this restricts choice and sometimes limits attainment.
- Teachers mark pupils' work conscientiously using a system which pupils understand and appreciate.

- A new electronic system for recording assessments is putting greater emphasis on monitoring progress than the previous system which summarised attainment at the end of a unit of work. Teachers are using this information well to help plan subsequent lessons.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum plan makes use of national units of work to create a teaching programme that meets pupils' needs well. Good use is made of 'continuous units' to sustain pupils' learning throughout the year.
- Teachers make modifications to these units to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the surrounding area, topical issues and their own enthusiasms and experience. Each unit of work is planned in detail and links are made with literacy and the use of information and communication technology (ICT).
- The recent re-structuring of the timetable to allow the units to be taught in blocks is facilitating the study of topics in more depth.
- The school website encourages pupils to access information about their geography topics from home.
- Good use is being made of developing links with schools in France, South Africa and Uganda to broaden the curriculum, and to stimulate interest in other places and in issues such as sustainable development.
- A particularly good feature is the focus on geography in assemblies in Key Stages 1 and 2. In most weeks throughout the year, pupils in Years 1 and 2 share information about visits they have made with Barnaby Bear to different localities. The illustrated diary they produce strengthens their understanding. It also effectively encourages family learning. Key Stage 2 pupils are encouraged to provide items from the news for weekly assemblies. This stimulates interest in world events and effectively broadens pupils' knowledge. Some contributions are made by pupils in the form of 'PowerPoint' presentations.
- The provision of fieldwork is satisfactory but inconsistent. Residential experiences in a field studies centre are offered in Years 5 and Year 6 but limited opportunities for outdoor learning exist for younger age groups. There is a lack of continuity in provision across the school which restricts pupils' acquisition of enquiry skills.

### Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- Your role in leading geography has secured a high profile for the subject in the school.
- Leadership is enthusiastic and based on a good understanding of how geography can contribute to pupils' learning across the curriculum.

- There is an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the subject. This is based on robust whole-school systems of monitoring and evaluation which focus not only on provision but also upon pupils' learning.
- The geography action plan identifies the right priorities for improvement. For example, a detailed audit of geography skills has recently been completed. It has established a clear framework for progression in learning across the school.

### Subject issue

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

- Teachers are encouraged to be creative in the activities they provide. Consequently, there is a good emphasis on making learning enjoyable.
- Pupils are offered good opportunities to learn about geography outside of the planned units of work for each year group.
- Some good links are made between geography and the work pupils are doing in literacy and ICT. For example, pupils are helped to understand how learning in other subjects helps their progress in geography.
- Teachers regularly invest time in planning the next steps in learning based on their ongoing assessment of pupils' learning.
- Good reference is made to National Curriculum requirements in planning and assessing each unit of work.
- Pupils lack consistent opportunities to undertake fieldwork to progressively learn the skills of geographical enquiry. However, the school has recognised this need and taken initial steps to remedy it.

### Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in geography is good.

- Pupils receive good levels of support from their teachers and from teaching assistants.
- Individual pupils are known well and teachers keep a close eye on their progress.
- Teachers have high expectations for the effort and involvement of all pupils in lessons.
- Teachers generally provide work which is suitable for the differences in ability in their classes. However, at times, the work set could provide more challenge by being specifically designed to meet the needs of different ability groups.

## Areas for improvement

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

- provide all year groups with opportunities to undertake fieldwork and to implement the recently completed skills audit to promote more consistent progression in enquiry skills
- ensure that pupils are consistently stretched by providing learning activities which are tailored to the needs of all ability groups.

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