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19 March 2008

Mrs Smith
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Dear Mrs Smith

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 a geography assembly and three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are both good.

- Pupils reach above average standards by the end of Key Stage 2.
- Achievement is good as pupils' progress well from their slightly above average attainment on entry to the school.

- Standards are generally high across all elements of geography. The knowledge and understanding shown by pupils of the places and themes they have studied is particularly strong. For example, Year 2 pupils have a detailed knowledge of the 'Island of Struay' and make accurate and detailed comparisons with the local area. Year 6 pupils know the location of major mountain ranges and appreciate how the nature of these environments affects human activity. Pupils have a good grasp of geographical vocabulary and understand difficult concepts well on the whole.
- Pupils have a good understanding of local environmental issues. Year 5 pupils apply their skills well to a study of traffic congestion in the town centre. Generally, however, pupils have a more limited appreciation of global environmental concerns and geographical enquiry does not play a consistent part in their learning.
- In lessons and discussions, it is clear that pupils enjoy the work they do in geography. They are interested in finding out about other places and they respect the diversity of culture of other people. They have acquired positive values about the importance of looking after their environment.
- Pupils are eager to learn. They confidently express their views orally and in writing. They listen very well and sustain their efforts in lessons.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Excellent relationships underpin the good quality of lessons. Teachers have created bright, welcoming classrooms and support learning by providing good wall displays about geography topics.
- Lessons are planned thoroughly and activities are chosen carefully to involve and interest pupils.
- Teaching is accurate and confident. Lessons proceed at a good pace.
- Good use is made of electronic white boards to present information and to provide engaging images of other places and environments. Pupils enjoy the vivid pictures and video clips which make learning easier. Year 6 pupils, for example, have acquired a detailed knowledge of different mountain environments and climates in this way.
- Pupils have a good understanding of their teachers' expectations because learning objectives are usually precise and shared well with them. This encourages them to work hard and accurately.
- Teachers set high standards and pupils are keen to learn, which is reflected in their good progress. However, activities are sometimes strongly directed by the teacher and pupils may be given limited choice about how they carry out their work. This restricts opportunities for geographical enquiry and the development of independent learning.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly and teachers make positive comments but these are sometimes too general to be helpful to pupils in knowing what to do next.

- The assessments done at the end of the units of work are assiduously recorded but are not used effectively to adjust future planning. The school is aware that the existing portfolio used to exemplify national curriculum levels needs extending and that teachers require more help to moderate their judgements.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- There is a good coverage of National Curriculum requirements as pupils learn three units of geography each year. Use is also made of 'continuous units', to sustain pupils' interest and learning when geography is not directly taught.
- Each unit is planned in detail and good advice from the subject leader has ensured that progression is generally good, although potential overlaps in coverage of local human and physical features has not been fully ironed-out.
- Teachers are encouraged to make modifications to geography units, to use the locality of the school, and to make links with literacy and information and communication technology (ICT). Consequently, there is a good variety of work undertaken across the school.
- The school makes generally good use of the local area to study aspects of geography. Also, a residential experience in a field studies centre in the Lake District is provided in Year 6.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- The subject leader brings a good knowledge of the subject to her role and provides enthusiastic leadership.
- Teachers are provided with good support and advice. Recently this has been established on a more formal and regular basis by the new headteacher.
- There is a clear and appropriate action plan which directs developments in the context of the school improvement plan.
- This plan is based on a secure understanding of what needs to be done to improve. This is because there is a robust approach to self-review in place in the school. So, for example, discussions with pupils about their learning and the scrutiny of their work have helped the subject leader tailor provision.

Subject issue

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

- The school has carefully considered the long-term plan it has established for the geography curriculum. This has been kept under review and changes to the sequence of units made to take account of changes in teaching staff and how to link units together.
- Teachers make generally good links with pupils' literacy needs. There is a good emphasis on teaching technical vocabulary and opportunities are provided to practice skills such as persuasive writing.
- The school has rightly identified the need to put assessment on a more secure footing in order to help teachers more effectively plan the next steps in learning.
- Geography is organised as a separate subject on the timetable. Hence, opportunities to make links with other subjects to help make learning easier and more meaningful are dependent largely on the creativity of the individual teacher.
- The school places emphasis on the importance of community cohesion in its wider curriculum. It encourages pupils to take part in various events in order to develop a better understanding of living in a multi-cultural society and of the needs of people in developing countries. This raises pupils' awareness but explicit links with the geography curriculum are not consistently made to reinforce their learning.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in geography is good.

- Teachers know their pupils well and are quick to provide them with support if they have a difficulty. Teaching assistants also are used effectively to provide additional help for pupils with learning difficulties or who are at an early stage of learning English.
- Teachers provide resources which engage and interest pupils. They plan activities which encourage all pupils to play a full part in lessons.

Areas for improvement

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

- place more emphasis on independent learning by establishing more frequent opportunities for pupils to apply their geographical enquiry skills
- complete the portfolio of pupils' levelled work and take forward plans to standardise assessment across the school

- develop the links being made between geography and other subjects to further strengthen the quality of provision and progression.

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