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Dear Mr Godfrey

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 22 and 23 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 how literacy is being used to enhance learning in geography.

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 two lessons at Key Stage 3. No Key Stage 2 teaching was observed.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory, with good features at Key Stage 3 but it is inadequate at Key Stage 2.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good at Key Stage 3 but inadequate at Key Stage 2.

- Year 6 pupils' work shows limited understanding of key areas of the Key Stage 2 geography curriculum, such as geographical enquiry and skills and how places differ and change. However, pupils do have a

satisfactory understanding of river features and processes, which they have studied in greater depth.

- At Key Stage 3, pupils have good attitudes to learning. They work enthusiastically in lessons and make good progress. However, the accuracy and presentation of maps and diagrams needs improvement.
- Year 8 achievements are good from a low starting point. Pupils are developing a good understanding of geographical patterns and processes and suggest plausible explanations. They show less secure understanding of the differences between places and the reasons for these.
- Pupils respond particularly well to co-operative tasks that involve decision making, researching information and discussing alternatives.
- Teacher assessments at the end of Year 8 and at the end of Year 9 in their subsequent school, show improving standards over the last three years to reach levels of achievement that are well above average. Boys' achievements are lower than girls, but the gap is closing.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching and learning is good at Key Stage 3 but inadequate at Key Stage 2.

- At Key Stage 2, teaching is undemanding, especially in Year 5, with an over-reliance on worksheet tasks. A greater range of activities and resources is used in Year 6.
- The geography work in pupils' exercise books and folders shows that they do not make satisfactory progress or achieve the learning intentions set out for each half term.
- Assessment does not monitor pupils' progress effectively or provide the school with adequate information about pupils' attainment in geography.
- At Key Stage 3, teaching is good with some very good features. Lessons are planned well and use an imaginative range of strategies to actively engage and motivate learners.
- Particularly effective use is made of teacher interventions and questioning to check understanding and consolidate learning, giving an emphasis to accurate use of geographical vocabulary.
- Teaching resources are used well, especially the use of animated, digital displays. However, Information Communication Technology is not widely used by pupils in lessons and wall displays are not used to celebrate pupils' achievements.
- Teaching employs a very good range of assessment for learning techniques, including peer assessment, to encourage pupils to improve. However, teachers' comments on written work does not always provide sufficient or specific information for pupils on how to raise their achievements.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory overall.

- The Year 5 and Year 6 curriculum and related assessment requires urgent review to ensure better coverage of the content of the Key Stage 2 Programme of Study and to enable pupils to raise their achievements.
- Currently pupils at Key Stage 2 have insufficient opportunities to develop fieldwork and enquiry skills, study distant places or learn about human patterns and processes.
- The scheme of work for Key Stage 3 has a clear focus on key questions and learning intentions. The current plans are in need of revision to better reflect the newer teaching and assessment activities and resources that are used in lessons.
- Geographical skills are generally covered well, although fieldwork techniques and presentation of maps and diagrams less so. The quarry field visit is currently insufficiently integrated with the teaching unit on primary activities.
- There are serious weaknesses in curriculum progression throughout the school arising from a lack of liaison between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 teachers. Several themes are repeated, with inadequate consideration given as to how early work can be built on in later study.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good at Key Stage 3 but inadequate at Key Stage 2.

- Key Stage 3 is led by a geography specialist, which is not the case at Key Stage 2. This has resulted in poor continuity. The good policies and learning strategies in place at Key Stage 3 are not applied to Key Stage 2.
- Regular assessments are used effectively to monitor progress at Key Stage 3, and identify those who need more support. A system of 'progress points' and 'challenges' has been introduced to motivate pupils. However, the setting of individual targets is not implemented with sufficient rigour to ensure that pupils have written guidance on expectations.
- Key Stage 2 geography is assessed within humanities and this does not provide adequate information for monitoring progress in geography. Humanities assessments are weighted towards history.
- At Key Stage 3 the subject leader meets regularly with geographers in local middle schools and the upper school. These links with the local geography community are used well to share practice and moderate standards. There are no comparable links with other schools at Key Stage 2.

- A good self-evaluation has been completed that incorporates evidence of pupils' views. Clear priorities for development have been identified and strategies are already in place to tackle one of these: raising boys' achievement. Shortcomings in Key Stage 2 geography are recognised by the school.

Subject issue

The extent to which literacy is being used to enhance learning in geography is good at Key Stage 3. Evidence was too limited on this visit to make a judgement at Key Stage 2.

- The improvement of literacy, especially for boys, is a school-wide priority and geography lessons are planned to play a part in driving up standards.
- Geography teaching draws effectively on the good practice being developed across the school. For example, paired activities are used to help develop speaking and listening skills and the acquisition of technical vocabulary. This also contributes to developing pupils' confidence to present their ideas and opinions.
- The emphasis on active learning in lessons is encouraging pupils to develop their thinking skills and their capacity to articulate ideas and opinions. This is proving particularly beneficial for boys.
- Geography provides opportunities for different genres of extended writing, although marking does not correct common spelling and grammatical mistakes.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in geography at Key Stage 3 is good. Evidence was too limited on this visit to make a judgement at Key Stage 2.

- Lessons are planned and executed carefully so that all groups of pupils make suitable progress.
- Teaching identifies and responds very well to different learning needs. Careful use is made of pupil groupings to vary the demands presented by learning activities.
- Unit plans include extension tasks for gifted and talented pupils, and the department joins with other local schools to provide a fieldwork day for these pupils.
- Good attention is paid to ensure all pupils can access the learning materials and contribute in lessons. Different tasks and class activities are provided for lower ability pupils, as appropriate. The teaching successfully gives all pupils the confidence to be effective geography learners.

Areas for improvement

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

- raise achievement at Key Stage 2 by improving the quality of teaching and learning, curriculum planning and assessment
- improve the presentation and accuracy of pupils' maps, diagrams and written work and introduce more use of ICT by pupils in lessons
- use the opportunity offered by the National Curriculum Key Stage 3 revision to ensure improved curriculum continuity and progression from Year 5 to Year 8, introduce more topical and relevant themes and broaden pupils' understanding of places at different scales.

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

Andrea Tapsfield
Additional Inspector