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Mr A Nicholas
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Dear Mr Nicholas

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 09 May 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 two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement and standards

Standards are satisfactory and pupils' achievement is good.

- Pupils' attainment on entry is very low and all pupils make good progress so that, by the end of Year 6, their standards are in line with national expectations. Pupils make limited progress in developing their fieldwork and enquiry skills.

- Year 6 pupils enjoyed immensely their river study as part of their residential course in South Wales, although their explanations of landforms and processes are not as confident as their descriptions.
- Year 3 pupils have a substantial amount of recorded work about the environment but they have only limited opportunities to develop their enquiry skills, such as when they investigated how the building of 300 houses on a local site affected the environment.
- Pupils develop their map work skills well but have insufficient opportunities to work with aerial photographs.
- Pupils' personal development is very good. It was outstanding in one lesson where all of the pupils were keen to learn and confident to answer questions and share their ideas.
- There is an effective focus on developing pupils' key skills of literacy and numeracy and these contribute to the good learning in geography by all groups of pupils, including those who are at an early stage of learning English.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching is good.

- Strengths of the teaching include effective class management that secures a very positive response from pupils, clear learning objectives that pupils understand, an emphasis on pupils using and understanding geographical vocabulary, good use of talk partners for short, sharp discussion of specific questions, and effective use of information and communication technology (ICT).
- Teaching does not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to ask and answer their own questions.
- Pupils have a general idea of their progress from teachers' regular marking and verbal feedback.
- A good start has been made to planning for the use of teacher assessment based on National Curriculum criteria.
- Stable staffing provides consistently good teaching, and teachers and teaching assistants have a good knowledge of the learning needs of individual pupils.
- Teaching focuses effectively on helping all pupils to learn the key geographical vocabulary, and to develop their skills of speaking and listening.
- Lessons are calm and purposeful, and all pupils are keen to learn and feel secure enough to offer their answers and ideas.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Year teaching teams develop medium–term plans for geography that are based on national guidance, and these give a sound framework for progression in pupils' geographical knowledge and understanding.
- The school plans in detail for pupils' map work skills in each year to develop and extend the skills already learnt but it does not plan so thoroughly for their fieldwork and enquiry skills.
- Fieldwork is provided in each year group although only about half of the Year 6 pupils have the opportunity to take part in the excellent residential fieldwork in South Wales.
- The school has not yet explored geography curriculum links with the nearby secondary school to which the majority of pupils transfer at age 11.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- The geography leader, who is also subject leader for history and religious education, carries out a frank annual self-evaluation of geography. This is used to identify appropriate priorities for the well-structured geography development plan. The priorities in the geography development plan contribute to the whole-school development plan.
- There is a cycle of good, regular monitoring to check the match between teachers' planning and pupils' work, and to ensure that lessons cover the key geography learning objectives. This monitoring does not yet evaluate the quality of pupils' learning in geography.

Subject issue

The impact of curriculum planning on progression in geography is potentially good. Currently it is satisfactory.

- A new curriculum framework based around themes, key skills and links between subjects has been effectively piloted this year and all the planning is in place for its implementation in the autumn term 2008.
- There is a thorough process of planning for this new curriculum which maintains the distinctiveness of the contributing subjects including geography. The planning includes coverage of the key learning objectives for geography and so provides a framework for pupils to extend and develop their geographical knowledge and skills year on year.
- Already, some good links have been made between geography and subjects such as art, literacy, ICT and religious education.

Areas for improvement

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

- provide curriculum planning which ensures that pupils develop effectively their fieldwork and enquiry skills year on year
- implement the plans for effective teacher assessment from next September.

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