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Miss C Mason
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Mason

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 21 May 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 five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement and standards

Standards and achievement are both good.

- As a result of good curriculum development, standards in geography are rising rapidly throughout the school.
- In the Foundation Stage, most pupils make good progress. They explore features of their local environment and become familiar with maps from a very early stage, using directional language confidently and accurately.

They learn about different types of home including their own and those of different animals.

- By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils' geography skills and understanding are good. They make good progress, which leads to above average-standards. Pupils undertake a wide range of interesting work and have a good knowledge of places they have studied. For example, they can construct 2D and 3D plans and recognise human and physical features in their locality as a result of the fieldwork done in the area. They are confident in following directions on maps and can describe routes accurately. They use information and communication technology (ICT) well to support their work.
- This good foundation is developed well in Years 3 and 4. Further first-hand experience enables pupils to develop their questioning and research skills and helps refine further their fieldwork abilities. Work on the seaside helps pupils to compare and contrast their locality with another. The study of rainforests helps pupils to investigate beyond their local area, consolidate previously learned skills and consider environmental issues.
- The high level skills and confidence developed lower down the school have not yet fully worked their way into Year 6. By the time they are 11, pupils demonstrate a secure knowledge of work they have studied and can write about them in some detail. Work on Chembakolli and France helps pupils to compare and contrast differing localities and increase their understanding of global issues. They can identify the features of rivers using appropriate geographical vocabulary. They are able to present their work in interesting and creative ways.
- Pupils enjoy their geography work. They respond very well to high expectations and interesting lessons, demonstrating very good attitudes and behaviour.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching is good.

- Teachers plan thoroughly and structure their lessons well with a broad range of activities. Learning objectives are made clear at the beginning of lessons and suitably recapped at appropriate times. Most lessons build sequentially on prior learning and plenaries are generally used to good effect to summarise what has been achieved.
- Pupils are helped to increase and consolidate new learning in a variety of interesting ways. Learning techniques are carefully selected to generate interest and enthusiasm which extend and challenge pupils' thinking well.
- Occasionally, there is too much teacher talk which results in pupils being seated for too long. This slows down the pace of lessons, leading some pupils to disengage with their learning.
- Pupils respond well to the interesting activities presented to them. Scrutiny of books shows that work appropriately meets the needs of pupils. In particular, challenge and extension activities are provided for higher attaining pupils. This ensures that they make good progress.

- Excellent use is made of ICT and visual resources, which pupils thoroughly enjoy. These activities provide additional interest and they help bring the subject to life.
- A new assessment programme had been implemented but this needs time to become fully established. In addition, the school does not have a portfolio of assessed work to help increase confidence in assessing and levelling geography work.
- Marking is good and usually informs pupils well about how they can improve.
- Lessons are well planned with differentiated activities and suitable tasks provided for pupils with different learning needs.
- Boys and girls have equal access. Questioning is widely distributed and involves all pupils. However, on some occasions supplementary questions do not challenge or extend pupils further.
- Teaching assistants and adults are generally well deployed to support individual or groups of pupils so that they can access the full range of learning opportunities.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good overall.

- The geography curriculum has appropriate breadth and balance and sufficient time for its delivery. It has been developed well in recent years.
- The integrated curriculum with its focus on key questions is well established and embedded from the Foundation Stage to Year 4. It is in the first year of its cycle in Years 5 and 6 with further development and modification scheduled to build on the school's successes.
- The school is satisfactorily resourced, but some maps and atlases need updating to support teaching and learning further. In addition, little evidence was seen of the use and development of large scale maps such as Ordnance Survey maps in Years 5 and 6.
- Very good opportunities are provided to develop speaking and listening, reading and writing skills in geography lessons. There are good cross-curricular links with other subjects, particularly English, history, mathematics and art.
- Fieldwork experiences in the school grounds, around the village of Cheswick, Twycross Zoo and Stoke Bruerne contribute well to pupils' learning and to the subject.
- Pupils throughout the school have a good awareness of environmental issues, such as recycling and the need for sustainable development.
- Excellent informative classroom displays add interest, support learning and help enhance the planned curriculum.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- School leaders are successfully implementing an enquiry-based, integrated approach throughout the school. This is leading to improved geography standards.
- An appropriate range of monitoring and evaluation strategies ensure that the subject leader has a good understanding of the strengths in the subject and the areas which need further development.
- Self-evaluation has been used to produce an accurate and appropriate plan of action. The school policy has recently been reviewed.
- Insufficient use has been made of subject-specific training to enable the school to be kept informed about current issues and developments in geography and establish good practice links with other subject leaders.

Subject issue

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

- The school is developing a good curriculum with some outstanding features. Building up from the Foundation Stage, school leaders have devised an integrated approach to teaching geography. Interesting programmes of study, based on key questions, which are naturally linked to other subjects, have been devised.
- Each theme has a suitable range of geographical enquiry. Teachers plan thoroughly in the long and medium term with good coverage of key learning objectives. This results mainly in good progression of geography skills, knowledge and understanding. Most pupils are suitably challenged, enabling them to make good progress in the subject.
- Where this approach is well established and embedded, some outstanding geography work is undertaken. However, activities devised for Years 5 and 6 do not yet sufficiently build on the good work lower down the school to extend pupils' skills sufficiently. Further work is planned to remedy this.
- Teachers evaluate critically the themes that have been studied each year and use the outcomes to improve them further for the future.

Areas for improvement

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

- continue to adjust and modify the geography themes, particularly in Years 5 and 6 so they build on prior learning and raise standards further in the subject
- implement a portfolio of assessed work and fully embed assessment procedures
- purchase additional resources to support further the geography curriculum

- make better use of subject-specific support and training to enable the school to keep abreast of recent developments in the subject.

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

Paul Weston
Her Majesty's Inspector