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Dear Mr Cookson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 15 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 two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement and standards

Standards are satisfactory although achievement is good.

- Pupils enter the school below the standards expected for their age. From this starting point, they make good progress to reach broadly average standards by the end of Key Stage 2.

- Pupils acquire a sound knowledge and understanding of the topics they learn. They are able to describe, at a standard appropriate to their age, the features of different places and physical processes using correct geographical vocabulary. For example, pupils in Year 2 describe aspects of life and some of the physical features on the 'Island of Struay'; Year 6 pupils accurately name major characteristics of river systems and understand the water cycle.
- Pupils acquire sound skills in using maps of different types and scales. On the whole, they can locate major features accurately.
- Across the school, pupils learn to make judgements about the environment and how it can be managed and improved. Older pupils show a good understanding of a number of local environmental concerns because they have learned to apply geographical skills to their investigations.
- In lessons, pupils behave well and learn confidently. They are attentive, are quick to answer questions and present their work carefully.
- Pupils enjoy the work that they do in geography. They show a keen interest in finding out about other people and places.
- They are learning to consider their personal responsibility in relation to a number of world and environmental issues. For example, Year 3 and 4 pupils made mature comments about how they could support children in India through the 'Send my friend to school' initiative. An older pupil commented about the waste of energy resources that 'this might affect other people in the future'.

### Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers have secure subject knowledge of the topics they teach and provide accurate presentations using large computer displays. These presentations make good use of up-to-date and interesting resources.
- Teachers use their knowledge of other countries and understanding of environmental concerns well to enliven the quality of their work. For example, a teacher's good knowledge of the Indian sub-continent was used effectively to ensure that pupils acquired a balanced understanding of rural and city life.
- Lessons are enjoyable and maintain pupils' interest well because teachers use a range of appropriate methods to move them on. For example, there is a good emphasis on pupils working in small groups and then sharing the results of their findings. This includes doing internet research as part of the lesson activities.
- Lessons are planned well on the whole, taking account of the range of abilities in mixed-age classes. Sometimes, however, the work provided is too broadly based.

- A good feature of planning is the focus on evaluating the outcomes of lessons for individual pupils. Teachers use these reflections well to promote pupils' progress across a topic.
- Pupils' work is marked conscientiously but teachers' comments are often not precise enough to guide pupils about how to improve their answers.
- The school has recently introduced a new method of recording the assessments of pupils' work. These are completed at the end of each year. Although this is helpful in providing an overview of standards, it is not utilised to guide pupils' progress. Pupils say that they do not know how well they are doing in geography although they like receiving merits for their work.
- Pupils are known well by their teachers because they spend two years in each class. Consequently, teachers are adept at applying the strategies which encourage individual learning and quickly recognise when pupils need extra help or need to be stretched more.
- Teachers have established good partnerships with teaching assistants. This enables small group and individual work to be planned effectively with their support, particularly for lower attaining pupils.
- Teachers employ effective methods to encourage all pupils to participate in discussions and to collaborate in group work. They tailor resources appropriately to the age and ability of pupils.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- National requirements are fully covered at both Key Stage 1 and 2. The scheme is planned effectively to ensure that pupils in mixed-age classes receive a balanced programme.
- The school uses commercial schemes of work but takes care to modify these for its own circumstances. For example, effective links are made with the Foundation Stage to promote a smooth transition between Reception and Year 1 work.
- There are some good examples of the use of literacy and information communication technology (ICT) to strengthen learning. For example, older pupils have written a good persuasive letter about the closure of post offices in rural areas. This kind of link is a recent development and is not yet applied consistently enough to strengthen connections between geography and other subjects.
- A strength of the curriculum is the extent and quality of enrichment. Very good use is made of visits and visitors to add additional stimulus to learning and to extend pupils' horizons in this small school. For example, one visit prompted older pupils to carry out an eco-audit and extended their understanding of energy issues.
- The school makes good use of the local area to study land use and environmental issues. Pupils are well prepared for these visits, as they are often focused on investigations into issues.

## Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- The subject leader has been in post for only a short period but has effectively carried out the priorities in the school improvement plan.
- These priorities build securely on the work done previously to establish the curriculum. As a result, there has been a beneficial increase in the number of visits and visitors, and the use of ICT, which have brought greater relevance to learning geography.
- Systems of self-review have been recently strengthened and are appropriate for the size of the school. These take account of the number of responsibilities that the subject leader carries.
- Although a range of evidence is considered when geography provision is reviewed, evaluation of its quality and impact upon pupils' learning is not yet sufficiently robust.

## Subject issue

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

- The school has recently participated in a creativity project with other schools in the Local Authority. This has begun to influence curriculum planning as teachers are encouraged to make links between geography and, for example, science and history.
- There are examples of the benefits of the relationships that teachers establish between, for example, a study of the Viking incursions and the geography of local settlements. This kind of connection helps establish more relevant contexts for learning geography. However, at present, these developments depend too much on the creativity of the individual teacher to influence improved progression in skills and knowledge across the school.

## Areas for improvement

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

- further develop assessment so that pupils are more involved in evaluating the quality of their work and have a better understanding of what to do to improve
- strengthen the links being made between geography and other subjects to further improve the quality of geographical provision and progression
- provide training so that the new subject leader is more able to make rigorous evaluations of provision and its impact.

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