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Mr Cohen
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Dear Mr Cohen

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 17 June 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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are both satisfactory.

- By the end of Key 2, standards are a little below average. The majority of pupils are just reaching the national expectation by the end of Year 6.

- Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 1 from their starting points on entry to the school. However, progress is only satisfactory in Key Stage 2 as it is uneven across Years 3-6.
- Pupils' make good progress in Years 1 and 2 in their knowledge and use of maps. They can locate and identify features of places in the locality and further afield. They are beginning to understand aspects of places which give them a different character, such as the features of a farm, or the seaside, and compare these to their urban environment.
- Progress slows in Key Stage 2 because some aspects of geography are not studied systematically and the teaching is not consistently demanding.
- Pupils' knowledge of places and how changes in these places occur is patchy. They have limited opportunities to investigate and write about topics and issues independently.
- Pupils' understanding about sustainable development is better. This is because of the work done by the school's Eco-Council and the involvement of all year groups in recycling schemes, in tending the school allotment and in making improvements to the school grounds.
- Attitudes towards geography are positive. In lessons, pupils listen well, are keen to take part, and try hard to complete work. Their behaviour is consistently good. They particularly enjoy helping to care for their environment and appreciate the visits which have increased in number this year.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. It is good in Key Stage 1.

- Lessons are well-organised and resourced, and build on good relationships to promote learning.
- Successful lessons provide a range of interesting activities which meet the needs of pupils at different stages of learning.
- Large computer displays are used well to interest and engage pupils' interest in the topic being studied and also to provide interesting resources and activities.
- Teachers identify learning objectives in their planning and share these with their pupils. However, these objectives are not always defined sharply enough to check accurately how far different groups of pupils have made progress.
- The work provided in Key Stage 2 is not always demanding enough. There is good quality work, for example, in Year 6 on Liverpool as a trading city, but in younger classes in the key stage pupils sometimes copy out work and complete simple worksheets.
- Teachers' marking of pupils' work is often limited to giving general praise rather than providing guidance on how to improve.
- The formal assessments of pupils' work, especially at Key Stage 2, are not systematic or rigorous enough. There is no mechanism to

exemplify the national curriculum levels that pupils are working towards in geography or to moderate teachers' judgements.

- Teachers use their good knowledge of pupils to respond to their learning needs as lessons progress. They vary their questions to pupils of differing ability, listen carefully to their answers, and work beside them to provide extra help if it is required.
- Teaching assistants are used effectively to provide good support for pupils with learning difficulties.
- Teachers plan and prepare work which is suitable for the different ability groups in their classes. However, sometimes, there is not enough challenge for the more able pupils in the activities provided especially in Key Stage 2.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum plan makes use of published units of work to create a scheme that meets national requirements.
- Teachers make modifications to these units to take some advantage of the opportunities provided by the locality and pupils' interests.
- The teaching programme derived from these units does not always allow pupils to study topics in sufficient depth or to develop their knowledge and skills progressively across Key Stage 2 to cover all elements of geography. For example, there are too few opportunities for pupils to do challenging writing tasks.
- Enrichment is good. The subject leader has sought out opportunities for visits to places of interest in the locality and in the region. Pupils in Key Stage 2 have two opportunities to take part in residential experiences which focus on geographical and adventurous learning.
- Care for the environment has a high profile through the work of the pupils' Eco Council and their School Council.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are satisfactory.

- The relatively new subject leader has carried out the responsibilities expected by the school enthusiastically.
- The subject leaders' role in organising a local primary co-ordinators network has been beneficial. It has promoted a better understanding of national requirements and the availability of fresh ideas and resources from organisations such as the Geography Association.
- The growing confidence of the subject leader has enabled her to enrich the curriculum and help colleagues with their planning and use of resources.
- Monitoring and evaluation has improved recently. The subject leader's discussions with groups of pupils from each year group and the

monitoring of their work books have identified similar weaknesses in provision and in assessment to those identified during this inspection

- Action to address these weaknesses is at an early stage and has not yet brought about desired improvements.

Subject issue

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

- The school has encouraged teachers to forge links between geography and other subjects to help improve pupils' learning. As a result, older pupils comment that, 'there is a bit of geography in a lot of our work'.
- The use that teachers make of this flexibility varies across the school.
- There are good examples in Key Stage 1 where links with the Foundation Stage curriculum are developing well.
- In Key Stage 2, the use of this flexibility is less evident and there has been limited attention given to ensuring progression in knowledge and skills. However, a new topic in Year 6 based on a study of Liverpool draws well on a range of different subjects and skills to promote learning effectively.

Areas for improvement

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

- ensure that teaching consistently challenges pupils' learning so that their progress is accelerated in Key Stage 2
- ensure that there is better progression in curriculum provision particularly at Key Stage 2
- improve assessment in order to evaluate pupils' progress effectively, to inform teachers' planning and to improve the quality of feedback to pupils.

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