

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs Fairhurst
Headteacher
Prescot Primary School
Maryville Road
Prescot
Merseyside
L34 2TA

Dear Mrs Fairhurst

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 18 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 good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good and standards are satisfactory.

- Pupils reach broadly average standards overall by the end of Key Stage 2.
- Standards are rising. A significant proportion of pupils are reaching standards in Year 6 which are just above the national expectation. However, the most able are not yet consistently reaching the Level 5 standard.

- Achievement is good as pupils make good progress from their below average attainment on entry to the school.
- Pupils acquire a sound knowledge and understanding of the places and themes they have studied, although some aspects of physical geography are relatively less secure. They develop good skills of geographical enquiry across the school.
- Key Stage 1 pupils know what different places are like. For example, they use geographical language accurately to describe physical and human features of the seaside. They use this knowledge and their skills of observation to make detailed comparisons with the local area.
- Key Stage 2 pupils readily recall information about different places and environments and can locate these accurately using maps of different types. They are developing a sound understanding of aspects of interdependence and are encouraged to explain the changes they study. For example, Year 6 pupils are building a good understanding of how and why Liverpool has changed through economic developments and successive waves of immigration.
- The good progress made in carrying out geographical investigations is underpinned by the excellent progress pupils make in their basic skills, such as in literacy and in information communication technology (ICT). For example, Year 5 pupils applied their literacy skills very well in a debate about whether a local road should be closed to traffic. They showed a good appreciation of the views of different groups of people towards this issue. Year 6 pupils have produced a 'pod-cast' for Year 2 pupils explaining the nature of 'carbon footprints', and an animated video exploring the experiences of different immigrant groups in Liverpool.
- Pupils' personal development is outstanding. They demonstrate very clearly their great enjoyment of the work they do in geography. They are really interested in finding out about other places and the diverse cultures of other people. They appreciate the 'adventurous learning' that they are encouraged to undertake.
- Pupils have very positive values about the importance of looking after their environment. This is encouraged by their work in lessons on global issues and also by the 'eco-warriors' who take responsibility in all classes for re-cycling schemes and environmental improvements.
- Pupils are very eager to learn. They make rapid progress in expressing their thoughts and ideas in a variety of forms. Their behaviour is excellent and they sustain their efforts in lessons. The confidence that pupils acquire translates very well into their capacity to carry out independent work.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teaching is accurate, confident and enthusiastic. It is often creative. Consequently, lessons proceed at a good pace because pupils are strongly motivated to learn.
- Teachers have created attractive, welcoming classrooms which have good geography displays.
- Excellent relationships underpin the good quality of lessons. Pupils know that their views are listened to and valued which promotes their self-esteem and confidence very well indeed.
- Lesson planning is very good. A particularly strong feature is the clear identification of the learning needs of different ability groups.
- A wide variety of activities are tailored well to involve and interest the different groups of pupils and to promote their learning.
- Very good use is made of electronic 'Smartboards' to provide engaging information about other places and environments. Laptop computers are used very effectively to develop independent learning skills.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly and teachers make positive and helpful comments. There is scope however, for pupils to be more involved in marking and evaluating their work.
- A new system of assessment is developing well. Teachers work effectively in phase teams to assess pupils' work at regular intervals. The use of 'key question' tests at the end of sections of work makes an effective contribution to measuring pupils' progress.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- There is a good coverage of National Curriculum requirements. This ensures that geographical learning has a high profile in the school.
- Effective collaborative planning ensures that there is good coherence of provision across the classes in each year group. There are also examples of team teaching which add variety to and extend learning opportunities.
- Each section of work is planned in detail resulting in generally good progression across each key stage, although aspects of physical geography are not built upon systematically.
- There is a good variety of work undertaken across the school and the curriculum is resourced very well.
- The curriculum is enriched well as the school makes good use of the local area and regional visits to study aspects of geography.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- There is a very clear vision and high expectations at the heart of school leadership about the role of geographical learning in the curriculum.

- The school is introducing a new system of subject leadership based upon the phase teams which have been established in the last two years. This is ensuring that there is a clear whole school view about the quality of provision.
- There are robust systems of self-review in place which focus strongly on evaluating standards and progress. A new, extensive data base of assessments is being used effectively to analyse performance and to identify future needs for improvement. However, at present, the system does not clearly show the attainment of the most able students nor does it readily allow analysis of the relative strengths of learning in different aspects of geography.
- There is an appropriate action plan which directs developments in the context of the school improvement plan.

Subject issue

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

- The school has embarked on an ambitious programme of curriculum change with geography a part of a 'knowledge and understanding of the world' area of learning. This is based on a very clearly articulated vision for whole school improvement.
- The new curriculum is grounded in a detailed analysis of community needs which has also involved frequent consultations with parents. This is feeding through into, for example, a much stronger emphasis on considering local themes and global issues.
- There are a growing number of examples of beneficial links being made between geography and other subjects. Phase teams are working hard to inject greater creativity and appeal into their planning with a good degree of success. The use of 'digital learning' figures strongly in these developments.
- Two good examples of where curriculum innovation is having a strong impact are in Key Stage 1 and in Year 6.
- The transition between Foundation Stage learning and the National Curriculum in Years 1 and 2 is being managed very well and is leading to higher standards.
- An exciting thematic project is being developed in Year 6 around the study of the development of Liverpool. This combines studying change through a number of subjects and puts a strong and effective emphasis on pupils leading their own learning.
- The school recognises that it needs to review the impact of this change of approach on curriculum progression across all the strands of geography.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in geography is very good.

- Teachers provide resources which engage and interest all pupils.
- Teachers plan activities and use strategies which encourage everyone to play a full part in lessons.
- Pupils' progress is tracked systematically and the school uses specific intervention strategies very well. For example, it has identified several groups such as 'passive girls' to ensure that they can be helped to improve their work.
- Teaching assistants are used flexibly and effectively not only to support but also to lead and extend the learning of all ability groups.

Areas for improvement

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

- further challenge the learning of the most able pupils so that they can reach above average standards
- ensure that there is good progression in all aspects of geography as the new curriculum is developed
- take forward the school's plans to build leadership in geography across the phase teams to ensure that subject improvements are carried out effectively.

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