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14 July 2008

Mrs Cairns
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Dear Mrs Cairns

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 25 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 three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are both good.

- From their broadly average attainment on entry, pupils achieve above average standards by the end of Key Stage 2.
- Pupils develop good skills of enquiry which they apply well to the study of different topics. They communicate their findings well through good quality writing and their skills of graphicacy.

- Pupils know where places are and what they are like. For example, Year 1 pupils have a good understanding about different places in the local area though the visits they have made. Year 3 pupils show a good understanding of the interplay of human and physical factors in the establishment of a new settlement in the American West; Year 5 and 6 pupils have a good knowledge of the human and physical geography of the Wirral peninsula. They also accurately locate major features on the world map.
- Geographical vocabulary and ideas are used with increasing sophistication as pupils move through the school.
- Pupils learn to explain their views clearly about environmental issues. For example, Year 6 pupils have written forceful letters to the Town Hall explaining the problems of establishing a new waste incinerator.
- Pupils enjoy the work that they do in geography a great deal. They like the choices they are given about how they work out the answers to problems and to present their findings.
- Pupils recognise the relevance of geography in understanding issues in their local area as well as in other parts of the world. They appreciate the interdependence of places and how the choices they make affect the lives of people in less developed countries. They know about the importance of looking after their environment and some of the difficulties in doing this.
- Whether individually, in pairs or in small groups, pupils learn confidently. They collaborate very well to share their knowledge and views. They behave very well in lessons and take a pride in their work.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Lessons are interesting and enjoyable and move at a good pace. Pupils quickly get down to work and they sustain their efforts.
- Teachers are enthusiastic and plan engaging and demanding activities which are linked together well.
- Teachers take good account of the needs of individuals and the different ability groups that are in their classes. Resources are used which appeal to and are accessible to all pupils.
- A range of effective methods are used to involve all pupils in learning such as encouraging pupils to work together and to apply their literacy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. As a result, pupils have plenty of opportunity to talk about their work and to undertake research. This helps bring about good progress.
- Teaching assistants and other adults are used effectively to provide additional help for pupils with learning difficulties.
- Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and make positive comments. Whilst pupils find these remarks encouraging, they do not have a good understanding of how well they are doing or how to improve their

work. Much of the writing which is done in the context of literacy is not assessed for its geographical content.

- There is a system for assessing pupils' progress in each year group. However, it does not easily lend itself to judging how well pupils are doing against national standards.
- The new subject leader has begun to establish a portfolio for reference purposes but there has been little moderation to ensure that teachers have a common understanding of standards.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The schemes of work for Key Stage 1 and 2 have been carefully constructed in order to meet national requirements.
- A commercial scheme has been implemented thoughtfully in the past year. It has been integrated successfully with the plans which previously were in place.
- There are generally good opportunities to apply basic skills but some ICT applications such as data handling are less well established.
- The curriculum is enriched well through a good range of resources, visits and visitors. The school holds the eco-school award which is reflected in work the pupils do in caring for their environment.
- Engagement with a local environmental group has also stimulated investigation into a range of local issues. This has captured pupils' interest and increased the relevance of learning geography for them.
- The school provides many opportunities for developing and applying enquiry skills outside of the classroom. The local area and region is used well to study aspects of geography. A residential experience in a field studies centre in Year 6 not only includes adventurous activities but a river study as well.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- The senior leadership of the school has a very clear vision for improvement which includes a commitment to developing the international dimension of the curriculum.
- The relatively new subject leader is being very well supported to develop his leadership skills. This has included shadowing the previous subject leader who was a geography specialist and being coached by the curriculum manager in self-review strategies.
- There is good understanding of the quality of curriculum provision and how it is promoting progression. This is because of the analysis of the evidence of work from pupils' books and from teachers' planning.

- Progress has been made in creating a portfolio of work from each class and in beginning the process of evaluating this work against national standards.

Subject issue

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

- The new scheme has made a good contribution to improving provision and progression. It has been adapted well to the needs of the school.
- The scheme puts emphasis on studying places and processes within a wider geographical context. It provides a good focus on themes of interdependence and environmental issues. Consequently, there is coherence to the work done in geography across the school.
- Teachers have retained effective topic plans from the previous scheme alongside the new programme. For example, a topic in Year 3 which links literacy with history and geography through studying the children's book 'Going West' is stimulating and successful.
- Teachers have also adapted new themes to their circumstances by making links with local factors and issues that are in the news. So, for example, Year 6 pupils have considered issues of sustainability in relation to local concerns.

Areas for improvement

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

- improve assessment so that pupils understand how well they are doing and the school can track pupils' progress in geography effectively
- complete the portfolio of pupils' work and use it to help teachers moderate their judgements against national standards
- extend the use of ICT applications in geographical enquiry.

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