

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 0207 421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



28 November 2008

Mr Bruen
Headteacher
St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary School
Thorburn Road
Norley Hall
Wigan
Lancashire
WN5 9LW

Dear Mr Bruen

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 22 October 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 how effectively geography teaching and the curriculum promotes community cohesion.

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, a governor 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 and there are examples of outstanding practice in some aspects.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good and standards are above average in geography.

- Pupils make good progress in gaining geographical knowledge and understanding as they move through the school. Less emphasis is placed on their progression in geographical skills.

- Geography begins in the Early Years Foundation Stage where good use is made of the internal and external environment to develop children's knowledge and understanding of the world. At Key Stage 1 geography focuses appropriately on both the local and the immediate outdoor environment as well as the acquisition of relevant geographical vocabulary. Stories are used as a stimulus for work on more distant places.
- By Year 6 pupils reach good levels of understanding because of challenging teaching, good relationships and very meaningful approaches to geographical learning in the school. They understand places and the complexities of relationships between human, physical and environmental issues. They develop positive values and attitudes to people and places and understand they are part of a local and global community. They are confident and independent learners with a range of geographical enquiry skills.
- There are good relationships in classrooms between staff and pupils when learning geography. Pupils are polite, respectful and welcoming. Pupils' personal development is excellent. They are well behaved and love learning about the similarities and differences between places.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall.

- Teachers have good generic teaching skills, appropriate subject knowledge and are clear about what constitutes good learning in geography. Teaching assistants work well with teachers to promote geographical learning and offer appropriate support to pupils. All of the geography teaching observed was good and some of it was outstanding.
- Enquiry approaches are a strength in the school and are used to ensure active and meaningful learning and encourage pupils to communicate their findings in a range of appropriate ways.
- Teachers and teaching assistants capture pupils' interest and enthusiasm for geography well. Where the teaching was outstanding the sequencing of learning ensured progression and the acquisition of geographical skills. In addition, very effective use was made of Information and communication technology to access information about life in distant places. High quality questioning involved all the pupils. Opportunities were also provided for pupils to discuss opinions and reflect on what they had discovered and this added depth to their learning.
- Pupils' work is regularly marked and commented on and teachers provide geography-specific guidance for pupils to be able to understand what they need to do to improve in the subject. Detailed assessment information, including pupil self assessments, are used to ensure the school has an accurate view of achievement and standards in geography.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The two year cycle of curriculum units and the scheme of work for geography ensure appropriate curriculum coverage. The curriculum meets statutory requirements and the needs of pupils.
- All groups of pupils have equal access to the curriculum through the well-designed differentiated activities and the good support provided.
- Good links have been made with other curriculum areas especially art, mathematics and drama.
- Although the geography scheme of work includes relevant information to support the progression of geographical skills at the end of each key stage, this is not planned for on a year by year basis particularly in relation to the development of fieldwork skills. The school has not utilised the support and resources available through subject associations to plan for the progression of geographical skills.
- The lack of emphasis on the geography of the United Kingdom in comparison with local and global geography makes it difficult for pupils to look at similarities and differences between life in this country and that in more distant places.
- The revised curriculum currently being piloted based on themed geographical weeks has had a tremendous impact and offers an exciting curriculum model to improve planning, teaching and assessment across the foundation subjects. The recent work based on this model, 'Asiamania' was excellent.
- High quality displays around the school celebrate pupils' growing knowledge and understanding of the world, their appreciation of similarities and differences and their awareness of a range of issues including topical issues and sustainability.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- The subject leader has a clearly defined role in the monitoring and evaluation of geography throughout the school. Accurate annual self assessments and audits are used to identify strengths and areas for development. These result in actions which further improve the quality of geographical work within the school. For example, as identified in the pilot project for the future development of a more thematic approach to the foundation subject curriculum and also in how these subjects are to be assessed.
- The subject leader has a clear understanding of progression in geography through her analysis of pupils' work and teachers' planning and her discussions with colleagues and pupils. She is able to accurately assess curriculum coverage and the quality of pupils' work.

- The school demonstrates a good capacity to improve its already good work in geography and to make increasing links to community cohesion at a variety of levels.

Community Cohesion

The effectiveness of geography teaching and the curriculum in promoting community cohesion is good.

- The school promotes the strategic development of community cohesion through a three fold approach based on building community cohesion in the school, working with parents and carers and the wider local community and broadening pupils' experiences in an international context.
- There are good links between geography teaching and the curriculum and community cohesion on a local and global scale but there are currently too few opportunities for pupils to develop an understanding of national cultural diversity and prepare them for life in multi-cultural Britain.
- Pupils learn to appreciate the complexity of, and the linkages between, communities.
- The school emphasises the importance of diversity and inclusion at a local and global scale and is using geography to positively influence pupils' attitudes and values.

Areas for improvement

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

- further develop the school's geography curriculum to ensure it is relevant to this particular school and community
- use the support and resources available from subject associations to assist planning for the progression of geographical skills
- evaluate the recent pilot project involving the use of geographically focused thematic weeks to inform revised approaches to planning, teaching and assessing the foundation subjects
- develop links with schools in other United Kingdom localities to allow pupils to discover more about other areas of the United Kingdom and gain a greater appreciation of life in multi-cultural Britain.

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

Angela Milner
Her Majesty's Inspector