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Dear Mr Connolly

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 04 November 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, pupils and a community volunteer, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of parts of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are in line with national expectations.

- At the end of Key Stage 1 pupils have a clear understanding of what geography is about. They know it includes the study of different parts of the earth and differences between places that result from

contrasting physical and human features. They understand that plans, maps, graphs and sketches are helpful in their geography work.

- Pupils have a basic knowledge of countries within the United Kingdom and Europe but are less knowledgeable about more distant countries.
- Pupils understand that observational skills are important and they can recall how they have used such skills to describe their school, the local community and a nearby town.
- By Year 6, pupils have made satisfactory progress. They are more aware of social as well as physical reasons for the differences between environments and the higher attainers are beginning to offer reasons for the contrasts. Their understanding is enhanced by their enjoyment of a range of fieldwork. However, pupils' knowledge of a range of global locations remains limited.
- The range of information and communications technology resources used in the teaching and learning of geography helps pupils to develop their investigational skills. They understand how to use the internet well but are less confident in their use of maps and atlases.
- The increasing range of teaching and learning strategies being used for geography and the more frequent opportunities for investigation help pupils to enjoy their lessons and to develop positive relationships with each other and with the staff. Many pupils are keen to be involved with the 'Green Gang' that develops their environmental awareness and understanding of sustainable development.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching is satisfactory.

- Teachers plan lessons well. They focus on what skills pupils will develop as well as on knowledge to be gained. They set a range of learning tasks to meet the needs of different groups of pupils well by varying the resources used and support given.
- The enthusiasm of teachers about geography encourages pupils' interest in their learning.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and as a result they give clear explanations to support learning. However, teachers do not consistently encourage pupils to use atlases independently or to present their own maps clearly.
- Open-ended and probing questions are used well to extend pupils' understanding but questions are less well used to check how well individual pupils have understood new geographical learning.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils. In the best lessons pupils are involved in research and decision-making and are given opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning.
- One to one interventions support pupils learning well. However, pupils are not always clear how well they are doing in geography or how to improve their work.

- Marking is not sufficiently developmental or subject specific. Pupils have too few opportunities to assess their own or others' work.
- There is some variability in the quality of teaching between classes. Pupils make good progress where teaching is planned around key questions and new vocabulary is chunked into manageable steps to maintain pace and builds from pupils' own experiences.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- A new curriculum has been implemented this year. It is well designed to emphasise geographical skills and to promote pupils' creativity and enjoyment. The planning ensures coverage of the key areas required by the National Curriculum but insufficient consideration has been given to how well the curriculum promotes progression. Too much emphasis is placed on developing skills in one class rather than across the key stages.
- Well chosen topics through which to deliver the curriculum are engaging and exciting pupils. They help pupils to make links between areas of subject learning and to develop transferable skills such as enquiry and communication.
- The emphasis on environmental education and sustainable development is strong and has led to the school achieving Eco status.
- The curriculum is resourced well. It is enhanced by links with the local community through visits and visitors. A wide range of artefacts help pupils to learn practically and actively. There are good opportunities for individual, paired and group work.
- Homework, although not formally and regularly set for geography, makes a good contribution to pupils' enjoyment and learning because it involves choice, is well integrated with the topics being studied and pupils understand its relevance.
- Opportunities for fieldwork are planned well in both key stages. In every class pupils experience some learning outside the classroom. Good use is made of the school grounds and the rich variety of land uses in the communities where pupils live.
- Day and residential visits within the north of England help pupils understand contrasting localities and make good contributions to the development of pupils' personal and social skills.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are satisfactory.

- The subject leader for geography is supported well by a member of the senior management team who has responsibility for curriculum co-ordination. They work well together as a team and are beginning to identify how to further improve the provision and outcomes in

geography as part of the whole school curriculum review. There is good capacity to ensure the subject continues to improve.

- Leaders have rightly identified the need to focus pupils' work on skills to enhance their subject knowledge and understanding. They have an accurate awareness of the standards that pupils achieve overall but are not yet using a more detailed analysis of pupils' achievements to inform curriculum planning.
- Subject monitoring is well established. Reviews of pupils' work and teachers' planning have informed the production of an appropriate development plan and progress with this is regularly evaluated. However, the plan is not sufficiently precise about the types of monitoring and evaluation evidence to be used and success criteria relate to improvements in provision rather than improved outcomes for pupils.
- All school staff work closely together as a team and this enriches opportunities for them to work collaboratively. As a result, revised planning systems are becoming quickly established and best practice is openly shared. This supports staff professional development alongside well planned internal training as well as inputs from external trainers.
- Geography is well resourced and the contributions of visits and visitors enhance subject development as well as pupils' enjoyment.

Subject issue

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

- A very wide range of provision helps pupils to improve their personal development and well-being, to understand their role as citizens and enhance their appreciation of community issues.
- Curriculum developments designed to extend opportunities for pupils to make decisions about their own learning help them to appreciate the relevance of their learning to their development as citizens.
- The school council is active and has helped to campaign for local safety improvements and the development of outdoor play opportunities.
- The 'Green Gang' enhances the work of the school in maintaining its eco status. They liaise well with members of the local community to improve the village environment and to participate in community events.
- The school is working hard to address gaps in pupils' understanding that were identified by previous inspection. Arts week included a successful focus on India and Pakistan which is helping pupils' international understanding. Pupils themselves chose to undertake charity work to support farming in Africa.
- The school is aware of the need to continue to integrate global citizenship more widely across the curriculum so that pupils develop greater awareness of multicultural issues.

- Fieldwork makes a very strong contribution to promoting community cohesion since it is based in both local and national locations that help pupils to understand differences, the reasons for these and how they as citizens can take responsibility for community improvement and sustainable development.

Areas for improvement

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

- develop the use of assessment to inform teachers' planning and subject improvement planning
- improve teachers' use of targeted individual questions and developmental marking so that they, and their pupils, have a better understanding of what pupils understand and what should be the next steps in their learning
- ensure the curriculum supports progression in geography skills.

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

Sonya Williamson
Her Majesty's Inspector