

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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Mr Knight
Headteacher
Darlinghurst Primary and Nursery School
Pavilion Drive
Leigh-on-Sea
Essex
SS9 3JS

Dear Mr Knight

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 11 March 2009 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 and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of data, analysis of pupils' work and observation of two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good and standards are broadly average.

- The context of the school has a significant impact on learning in the subject. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with very variable levels of knowledge and understanding of the world. In addition a significant number of pupils enter and leave the school at times other than the normal entry points.

- Pupils make good progress in their understanding of geography as they move through the school and reach standards broadly in line with national expectations in geography.
- Pupils are well behaved and enthusiastic about learning geography. They particularly value the memorable learning experiences gained from the visits they make outside school and their growing awareness of environmental and global issues.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage knowledge and understanding of the world is developed through a range of appropriate activities linked to the children's interests and experiences.
- In Key Stage 1 geography focuses appropriately on direct experiences based around the school grounds and local environment. For example in a mixed Year 1 and Year 2 class pupils study geography through an 'All around us' topic: identifying geographical features using maps and photographs and using a range of observation and recording skills.
- More distant places are effectively explored through indirect experiences including the use of visual images, stories, artefacts and information and communication technology (ICT).
- By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils show good levels of understanding of places because of the good teaching they receive, the meaningful learning experiences provided and the good relationships in the school. They understand the complexities of relationships between physical, human and environmental issues and that they are part of a local and global community.
- Pupils become confident, independent learners able to utilise a range of geographical enquiry skills but many pupils lack basic locational knowledge about places.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- 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. All of the geography teaching observed was good.
- Enquiry approaches based on key geographical questions are a strength. They are used to provide meaningful learning experiences and encourage pupils to communicate their findings in different ways.
- Teachers and teaching assistants capture pupils' interests. High quality questioning involves all pupils. Pupils have good opportunities to discuss their opinions and work together to reflect their findings.
- Teachers plan very carefully differentiated geography lessons which cater well for the needs of all groups of pupils.
- Lessons are well planned to maximise relevant curriculum links. For example, in one Year 5 lesson, pupils used their geographical knowledge about the destruction of tropical rainforests, their literacy

skills in persuasive writing and their ICT skills to produce podcasts, short films and animations to alert others to this global issue.

- Long term planning does not, however, ensure planning for progression in the acquisition of a range of geographical skills.
- Work is regularly marked and commented upon. Older pupils receive written feedback on how to improve their work.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- Curriculum planning and schemes of work ensure curriculum coverage that meets statutory requirements and provide a relevant context for geographical learning.
- Good use is made of visits and visitors to raise pupils' awareness of issues, the locality and other cultures and places.
- The school's International Schools Award status is used to enhance the geography curriculum. The school has developing links with schools in Norway, France and India.
- The school is aware of the need to develop pupils' basic locational skills and greater pupil knowledge and understanding of the geography of the United Kingdom (UK).
- Classroom displays are used well to celebrate the curriculum and pupils' improving knowledge and understanding of the world.
- The school has a range of appropriate geographical resources and good use is made of ICT in teaching and learning.
- The geography curriculum is currently being reviewed and enhanced in conjunction with the local Excellence Trust initiative - a curriculum for Southend.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are satisfactory.

- The school acknowledges that geography has not been a recent priority for the school.
- The school has recently appointed a part-time subject leader with a clearly defined role in the monitoring and evaluation of geography throughout the school. This role currently lacks sufficient emphasis on monitoring achievement and standards and the quality of pupils' work. Accurate annual self-assessments are used to identify areas for development.
- The school has not utilised the support and resources available from the subject associations to improve provision in geography.
- The school demonstrates a good capacity to continue to improve its work in geography.

Subject issue

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

- The school is aware of community cohesion requirements. It has evaluated its current provision and undertaken a survey of pupils' views.
- There is a lack of strategic planning for the development of community cohesion in the geography curriculum.
- The school is a welcoming and inclusive community with a strong emphasis on care. This is clearly evident in geography lessons by the positive attitudes of the pupils and the way in which they support each other.
- The school makes extensive use of local contacts to enrich learning and support teaching in geography.
- The school places great emphasis on the importance of diversity and inclusion at a school, local and international scale and is using geography to positively influence pupils' attitudes and values.
- There are currently too few opportunities in geography lessons for pupils to develop an understanding of national cultural diversity and prepare them for life in multi-cultural Britain.
- Pupils have a good understanding of sustainability issues and make a positive contribution to their own school environment.

Areas for improvement

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

- use the support and resources available from the subject associations to assist in planning for the progression of a range of geographical skills including locational skills
- develop links with schools in other UK localities to allow pupils to discover more about other areas of the UK through their study of geography and gain a greater appreciation of life in multi-cultural Britain
- evaluate the current range of approaches being used to plan the foundation subject curriculum to finalise the school's approach to delivering and monitoring the geography curriculum.

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