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Mrs J Cook-Hannah
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Cook-Hannah

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 25 February 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 pupils' work and observation of two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

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

- At the end of Key Stage 1, pupils have a good idea of the range of different cultures. However, due to the topic approach they are unclear that geography is about the study of the world, places and people.
- Pupils develop their locational knowledge very well from their early experiences to when they leave the school. Pupils learn to use and draw maps regularly from an early age. They are familiar with atlases.

- Pupils can name and locate a range of places and have a good knowledge of basic facts about a range of other countries. By Year 6 pupils have an improved understanding of what geography is about and they are able to use a range of geographical vocabulary accurately.
- The lack of clear progression in their learning prevents pupils from achieving better. When pupils are challenged and they study a topic in greater depth outcomes are often good or better. However, where the tasks set are superficial pupils made weaker progress. At present, learning is inconsistent and varies between topics.
- Better progress is made where pupils are able to learn in the outdoor environment. This is particularly noticeable in the work completed during their residential visit to the Lake District and in some of the more local studies.
- Pupils benefit from learning about topical issues and current affairs. They perceive these as being relevant to their lives. When they are enabled to do this they show a high level of understanding and a good perception of the issues. This was noticeably exemplified through their study of the conflict in the Middle East, notably in Gaza.
- Pupils enjoy geography and are keen to be involved in lessons especially when they are engaged with the topic. The behaviour of the overwhelming majority of pupils is good and they listen carefully to their peers and teachers.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching and learning in geography is currently inconsistent across topics. At times it is outstanding but it can also be just satisfactory.

- Teachers seen had good generic skills and some aspects of the lessons observed were good or outstanding. However, scrutiny of pupils' work showed inconsistencies across the topics being taught.
- When the work is well planned and there a clear structure which is clearly focused on the learning of geography, pupil outcomes are good.
- Where tasks set lack challenge and are sometimes inappropriate this reflects insecurities teachers may have in teaching a subject for which they have had little training or support.
- Real learning occurs when pupils are stimulated by the tasks set and asked to develop their thinking. Superficial learning occurs when they are merely asked to accumulate information.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The geography curriculum has been evolving and improving over several years. There is a clear vision and structure which meets statutory requirements and ensures that children get exposure to the full range of topics.
- Some units of work are detailed and well planned and allow pupils to progressively develop geographical skills, knowledge and understanding. Elsewhere, the content may be geographical but there is a lack of structure or direction which does not support geographical learning. As a result, pupils' development in geography is erratic and patchy.
- Where teachers are less secure in what is good geographical learning, geography often provides a context for learning in other subjects. In these cases pupils' views of countries such as Spain or India are often cultural and lack real understanding of what the place is really like.
- The school is developing a good programme of fieldwork and visits to contrasting localities which provide real learning opportunities for the pupils and is commented on positively in how it brings their learning about places to life.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are satisfactory overall.

- The development and management of the subject is undergoing a period of transition and change. You, as headteacher, have taken temporary charge and have ensured that improvements have continued to be made to the structure of the evolving curriculum. This will be taken on by a colleague in the near future. The capacity to ensure the subject continues to improve is good.
- There is a comprehensive geography policy that has clear objectives and which identifies the main teaching and learning intentions and processes in each key stage. It also includes a clear rationale for planning and identifies the need to link learning with other subjects.
- The school is tracking the curriculum well. Currently, the focus is on guaranteeing coverage rather than ensuring the quality of the provision.
- Resources are adequate but the quality of these varies and better resources are clearly linked to the better planned units of work. Where resources are good the subject is taught well.
- The school has had no access to quality subject specific advice which has meant it has been unaware of the support available through subject associations. As a result, teachers have had little subject specific training or support to enable them to build up their confidence and expertise in teaching the subject.

Subject issue

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

- One of the aims of the school's geography curriculum is to foster a sense of global citizenship amongst the pupils. The school is doing this well, although this is not yet consistent across all topics
- Through a focus on a variety of places, both near and far, geography is being used to make pupils aware of the world around them and some of the issues which are impacting on their lives.
- Some of the coverage of topics such as fair-trade and poverty are beginning to open pupils' minds to issue such as inequality and justice.
- Where the topics are well planned, and particularly through the units linked to 'geography in the news', pupils are being exposed to learning about a range of sensitive issues. Studies of the war in Afghanistan, the plight of refugees in the Congo and particularly the recent study of the conflict in Gaza have enabled older children to debate sensitive and real issues which have a relevance to their lives and future wellbeing. Pupils are able to discuss the issues with conviction and show a real understanding of both sides of the argument.

Areas for improvement

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

- ensure that progression is planned into the curriculum through the teaching units in order to provide a clear pathway for pupils to develop their learning in geography
- utilise the expertise and support provided by the subject associations to provide teachers with relevant and suitable resources as well as training, where appropriate, to improve their confidence in teaching geography
- monitor the outcomes for pupils as well as the coverage to provide a clear idea where specific areas need to be improved with additional quality resources or approaches
- build on and utilise the wide range of outdoor experiences pupils' receive to further enhance learning in geography.

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

Leszek Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector
Specialist Adviser for Geography