

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 Thomson
Headteacher
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School
Dorset Road
Somerford
Christchurch
Dorset
BH23 3DA

Dear Mr Thomson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 13 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 pupils' work and observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

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

- Pupils develop skills well. From an early age they are used to using atlases as well as a variety of maps. By the end of Year 6 pupils use these with confidence and their mapping skills are further honed

through frequent opportunities to use these practically, particularly through orienteering.

- There are opportunities for pupils to develop fieldwork skills, particularly at Key Stage 2. Observation skills are best developed but there are less frequent opportunities to collect and analyse firsthand data.
- Pupils have good recall of geographical vocabulary and are able to locate a variety of places and recognise geographical features. They have good spatial awareness.
- Pupils are less secure in their more in-depth knowledge and understanding of places. In too many cases, they have only a superficial understanding of what a place is really like. They also have insufficient understanding of topical issues.
- Pupils are generally responsive in class and keen to answer questions. Relationships with teachers and their peers are positive.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching and learning in geography is satisfactory overall.

- Teaching of geography is satisfactory with a clear focus on factual recall. Pupils have fewer opportunities to think geographically.
- Teachers seen had good generic teaching skills but lacked the confidence and geographic expertise to teach the subject well.
- The range of approaches used in teaching geography, other than geographical skills, limits opportunities for pupils to develop real geographical understanding. There are few opportunities for pupils to develop geographical enquiry.
- Pupils enjoy working collaboratively, particularly when they engage in learning outside the classroom. Unfortunately, these experiences, though valuable, are not sufficiently structured to enable them to progressively develop a real understanding of geography in the world around them.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly but doesn't inform pupils sufficiently how they can improve their learning in geography.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is currently inadequate.

- The school acknowledges that the curriculum is a 'work in progress' as it is currently developing a cross-curricular approach to the teaching of foundation subjects.
- At present, there is an over emphasis on skills to the detriment of knowledge and understanding. As a result pupils' progress in geography is fragmented.
- Although most topics are covered, the opportunities to study a range of places in sufficient depth are limited.

- There are also insufficient opportunities to study topical issues which can provide a real opportunity for pupils to understand the world around them and how these issues can impact on their own lives.
- There are few opportunities at Key Stage 1 for pupils to use the local area to develop a good understanding of the characteristics of the physical and human world immediately around them.
- At Key Stage 2, pupils complete fieldwork linked to their study of rivers while visiting Hengisbury Head as well as during their residential stay in the Swanage area. These opportunities are valued by the pupils but there are insufficient opportunities to utilise these experiences fully as part of their study of geography.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are satisfactory overall.

- The newly appointed curriculum leader is aware of areas of the curriculum in need of development and is keen to improve provision in the subject.
- Curriculum coverage is monitored but there is less evidence that the gaps and lack of progression in pupils' work have been identified.
- Resources are good for the teaching of geographical skills, especially map skills. However, resources for the in depth study of places are more limited.
- Insufficient use has been made of the support, training and guidance provided by the subject associations to develop the curriculum and geographical learning.
- There has been no programme of staff development to develop teacher expertise to enable them to teach the subject with confidence.

Subject issue

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

- Pupils are aware of the wider world but lack the detail to understand it more deeply.
- There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to learn about and debate topical, sensitive or controversial issues.
- There are only limited links through the geography curriculum to enable pupils to develop an understanding that they live in a complex and diverse world.
- Pupils enjoy working collaboratively and have a positive attitude to one another in geography lessons.

Areas for improvement

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

- develop teacher confidence and expertise to enable them to teach geography more effectively and really engage and challenge pupils
- develop a curriculum which builds on the good foundation of geographical skills to enable pupils to progress in their knowledge and understanding of places
- explore possible international links through the curriculum to enhance the study of contrasting and diverse places and support community cohesion.

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