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Mrs H Gill
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Dear Mrs Gill

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography 2009/10

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 02 July 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 one lesson.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are both good.

- Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They regularly use rhymes and stories such as 'Going on a Bear Hunt' as a stimulus to their work to explore features of their local environment. They become familiar with maps at an early age. For example, one child acting as the 'station master' confidently drew the route the train would take on a journey from Rickmansworth to London. Children use directional

language confidently. They have good knowledge of different habitats, especially those of animals and insects.

- By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils' geography knowledge and understanding are good. They make good progress to achieve above average standards. Pupils explore their local environment and visit a number of places of interest such as the Grand Union Canal at Batchworth. They develop their field work skills well by undertaking a range of activities such as sketches and surveys. They confidently compare and contrast their locality with Struay.
- This good foundation is developed well in Years 3 and 4. Further first hand experience enables pupils to develop their questioning and research skills and helps refine further their fieldwork abilities. The study of the local environment helps consolidate previously learned skills. Work on holidays helps pupils increase their understanding of different world climates. The study of Kenya helps increase pupils' understanding of communities beyond the United Kingdom.
- By the end of Year 6, pupils have undertaken a good range of problem solving activities. Pupils have considered issues such as 'What would we do if there were no rivers, lakes and reservoirs?' Work on rivers is promoted well by independent research with outcomes presented in creative and interesting ways. By the end of Key Stage 2, most pupils make good progress to achieve above average standards.
- Pupils are keen and interested in their work. They talk confidently about a range of geographical issues that they have studied. Their behaviour is good and relationships between adults and pupils are also good.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching is good.

- Teacher's plan and structure their lessons well. They use a variety of activities which are carefully selected to develop and extend pupils' thinking.
- Learning objectives are made clear to pupils and the use of key questions, which are widely distributed, helps pupils retain their focus on the purpose of the lesson.
- Pupils respond well to the varied opportunities provided for them to work individually, in pairs or in small groups ensuring access to a variety of learning techniques.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good and they use appropriate geographical vocabulary. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well to support learning which pupils say increases their understanding and interest.
- Scrutiny of books and work on display shows that work appropriately meets the needs of most pupils. Occasionally, the same tasks are set for all pupils regardless of ability which does not always provide sufficient challenge to the higher attaining pupils. In addition, pupils sometimes present their work untidily.

- Teachers make thorough assessments of pupils work at the end of each unit. This gives them an accurate picture of how well they have completed the task. However, the current assessment approach does not build on pupils' prior skills in order to increase further their rates of progress. The school knows this and is about to implement a key skills assessment strategy to remedy the situation.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The geography curriculum is good with appropriate breadth and balance and sufficient time for its delivery. The curriculum is at a point of transition with further development planned to develop a skills based cross curricular approach to learning the subject throughout the school.
- Good opportunities are provided to develop speaking and listening, reading and writing skills in geography lessons. There are good cross-curricular links with other subjects, particularly English, mathematics and history.
- Pupils have a good knowledge of environmental issues and fully understand their complexity as a result of their work as an Eco-School. Good use is made of the bird hide and nature walk located in the school grounds to support learning.
- There is a good emphasis on environmental change and sustainable development throughout the school. The 'Green Team' are enthusiastic advocates of change. Issues such as recycling and climate change are explored well.
- Pupils use appropriate and interesting ICT resources including the internet to support their learning.
- Fieldwork experiences in the school grounds, Open Mead Farm, Rickmansworth Aquadrome, Cuffley Outdoor Centre and Plas Nantglyn contribute well to the subject and pupils' learning.
- Resources have been improved following the recent purchase of globes, maps and atlases.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- The subject leaders' folder is well organised, thorough and detailed.
- A good range of monitoring and evaluation activity such as planning and work scrutiny ensures that the subject leader has a good understanding of strengths in geography and areas that require further development. Outcomes are drawn together in a comprehensive self evaluation document.
- The subject leader has not had the opportunity to formally monitor pupils' learning.

- There is a geography policy, but this is in need of further revision to take account of recent developments and amendments.
- Governors have a good understanding of strengths and weakness. They receive reports and updates and regularly attend meetings with the subject leader to discuss progress.

Subject issue

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

- A good range of community cohesion activities are promoted within the immediate locality. However, pupils' understanding of different UK and world localities are not so strong because they are not taught in sufficient depth.
- No evaluation has been undertaken to determine the impact that these activities have on pupils' understanding or learning about community cohesion linked issues.
- Although the school recognises the importance of delivering community cohesion through the geography curriculum, explicit links are not yet identified within the geography policy or within the geography schemes of work.
- Relationships are good. There are positive interactions between all learners and staff.

Areas for improvement

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

- continue to review the curriculum and link subjects together where appropriate to make geography even more interesting, relevant and enjoyable for pupils
- devise a simple method of sharing assessments made by teachers which effectively tracks pupils' progress and helps receiving teachers build on pupils' prior skills in order to increase rates of progress
- develop pupils' understanding of different UK and world communities by studying them in greater depth
- provide opportunities for the subject leader to formally monitor and evaluate learning in geography lessons and share findings with staff and governors.

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

Paul Weston
Her Majesty's Inspector