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Mrs Wickham
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Wickham

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 11 May 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 outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are both outstanding.

- Pupils develop skills exceptionally well due to the wide variety of practical experiences provided. From an early age they are used to using picture atlases, globes as well as a wide range of maps. Through a residential week that they have in Cambridgeshire in Year 5 they have good practical experience of using maps in unfamiliar areas.

- There are opportunities for pupils to develop fieldwork skills throughout their school career and data collection and analysis as well as observational field sketching are of a high standard.
- Pupils, many of whom are new to learning English, can recall a good range of geographical vocabulary.
- Pupils are given good opportunities to learn about places far and near and these include ones that have special meaning for members of the school. The work on Trinidad related to a teacher's parent and brought the whole experience to life for the pupils as they wrote to the lady. This helped them to get a good in-depth knowledge and understanding of a Caribbean Island.
- Pupils are very responsive in class and keen to answer questions. Relationships with teachers and their peers are very positive despite the huge mixture of abilities and backgrounds. The Catholic ethos of respect and caring for each other and the world is very evident.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding.

- Work is very well planned with a wide variety of activities and resources used, these are carefully selected to extend pupils' thinking and add interest to the lessons.
- Pictures are well used as prompts for those who are new to learning English.
- In one outstanding lesson, Year 2 pupils learned a great deal by comparing the inner city area around the school with an imaginary Scottish Island. The use of related stories and very good multimedia presentations enhanced everyone's understanding. A particularly good discussion arose about the different types of market in each locality; the children were fascinated that they sold sheep in Scotland whereas tropical fish and pets were the only animals in their local market!
- Lessons are well paced. Pupils responded very positively to precisely targeted questions and opportunities to work in a variety of different ways. In all lessons, good opportunities are provided to develop speaking and listening, reading and writing skills.
- The progression in pupils' skills is evident in their beautifully presented work; both in their books and on the many vibrant cultural displays.
- Pupils remembered with excitement the day when their street was closed to traffic and all the exciting geographical enquiry they could then do. This led to impressive work on the school's travel plan which especially extended high attaining pupils.
- Good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) and visual resources by teachers. Pupils are confident in using ICT resources and internet links are being established with a school in Malta to support learning in geography. They have good access to digital cameras and programmable directional devices to further develop their learning.

- Assessment and moderation of pupils' work is at the end of units and examples are kept by the coordinator to further clarify for all teachers the levels achieved.
- Pupils love the subject and know how well they are doing. Marking strictly follows the whole school policy and informs pupils how well they have done and what they can do to improve.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

- The school adjusts the curriculum in a cyclical process and is already considering their options for the next review. Thought is being given to altering the concentration of fieldwork in one location in Key Stage 1.
- Cross-curricular approaches are used for some of the topics but it is noteworthy that opportunities to maximise the use of maps are taken in all subjects.
- Topics and theme weeks give pupils great opportunities to study a range of places in depth. There are also good opportunities to study topical issues such as the recent earthquake in Italy.
- The curriculum helps pupils understand the global nature of the world and that children in the school may have family and friends in regions that come up in the news. They are only too aware of the impact of conflict and discord in some countries.
- There are excellent opportunities for pupils to use the local area to develop a good understanding of the characteristics of the urban environment. For example, they were able to persuade the developers of the giant local shopping centre to incorporate a small environmental area in it which they are helping to design.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- The newly appointed curriculum leader is aware of the areas of the curriculum in need of development and is keen to further develop the provision in the subject.
- Curriculum coverage is monitored and minor gaps have been identified and are being addressed.
- Resources are good for the teaching of geographical skills, especially map skills. Library and ICT software provision are very carefully selected and are of a high quality. There are arrangements for children to access some advanced programmes elsewhere when needed.
- As yet the coordinator has not had a chance to utilise the support provided by the subject associations. However, staff can access good subject specific training locally when needed or when it is identified in their performance plans.

- You keep a watchful eye on the development of the subject and ensures the schools' high standards are maintained.

Subject issue

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

- The school community cohesion plan identifies where geography assists pupils' understanding of the diversity of the world around them. An excellent range of opportunities are provided throughout the school to learn about local and global issues. This helps pupils to feel at home in the school and in the locality, although some are far from their original homes.
- Relationships are excellent. Positive interactions between all learners and staff are successfully fostered.
- The school works well with the children's centre and other partners in the locality. This includes a strong link with the BBC where pupils have given their views on world events on the Newsround programme and have tried their hands at practising delivering the national weather forecast.

Areas for improvement

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

- consider further developing community cohesion by linking with a school in the Cambridgeshire locality (where the school's residential trip is held) to enable pupils from diverse cultures to collaborate on joint geography projects
- utilise the support of the subject associations to continue to develop geography in the school.

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

Mo Roberts
Her Majesty's Inspector