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29 September 2009

Mrs J Willetts
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Willetts

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography 2009/10

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 14 September 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 particular focus on assessing how effectively geography teaching and the curriculum promote 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 five lessons in Key Stages 1 and 2.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is satisfactory.

- Pupils make satisfactory progress. From starting points that are well below national averages they achieve standards of geography that are below average by the end of Key Stage 2.
- Pupils have a good understanding of their own local community and the importance of their role as active citizens. They can discuss environmental and sustainable development issues confidently.

- Pupils' skills of enquiry and communication are well developed. In a good whole-school assembly, Year 6 pupils used visual presentations, well-researched information, philosophical questions and poetry to express their views about inequalities between communities.
- Pupils' knowledge and understanding of locational and physical geography is weak. They have limited awareness of similarities and differences within regions, countries and continents. Their understanding of global issues is developing but is not yet based on sufficient understanding of geographical patterns and processes.
- Geography contributes well to pupils' personal development. The strong emphasis on paired and group discussion in lessons helps them to understand the benefits of collaborative working. They are also encouraged to be independent learners and have good opportunities to develop research skills, using information and communication technology (ICT).

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching is satisfactory.

- Teachers use a wide range of teaching and learning styles. Many activities are interactive and pupils particularly enjoy these. ICT is also used to good effect for teaching and for learning.
- Teachers plan and structure lessons well and link them to learning objectives. They build good opportunities for assessment into their lessons.
- Good emphasis is given to the development of pupils' speaking and listening skills. Teachers explain the lesson objectives well, so that pupils quickly understand what is required.
- Teachers' geography subject knowledge is weak. As a result, their questions are not always sufficiently probing.
- Insufficient use is made of images of places to increase pupils' knowledge and understanding.
- The subject content and range of geographical skills offered are not sufficiently specific. They do not build on pupils' own experiences to tackle the known gaps in their understanding.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The school has worked hard to develop the geography curriculum, using a topic approach. It has been successful in promoting enjoyment and creativity, emphasising children's rights and encouraging critical thinking.
- The curriculum is aptly underpinned by a range of schemes designed to foster the international dimension; encourage enquiry; and develop collaborative learning.

- Global citizenship and education for sustainable development are at the heart of the school's development plans.
- Limitations in teachers' subject knowledge mean that insufficient attention has been given to planning the specific detail of the schemes of work to ensure the progressive development of pupils' understanding.
- The geography curriculum is not yet linked closely enough to the assessment of pupils' knowledge, skills and existing experiences. When gaps in pupils' understanding are identified, the school makes plans to meet these needs but this is done retrospectively.
- Visits and visitors make good contributions to the geography curriculum. Field work experiences enhance pupils' understanding of rural environments which contrast with their local community. However, opportunities to ensure the progressive development of pupils' fieldwork skills are frequently missed.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good and shows good capacity for further improvement.

- The subject leader is dedicated and conscientious. Self-evaluation is broadly accurate and is based on a good range of activities, including: examination of teachers' planning; scrutiny of work; consideration of pupils' opinions; and lesson observation.
- Although the monitoring of teaching and learning is not yet linked to specific criteria, its outcomes are communicated well to staff during training meetings.
- Individual teachers are helped to improve their practice through working in teams and being coached by the subject leader. However, they do not benefit from the resources and training provided by subject associations.
- The subject leader understands the importance of ensuring progression and how the new assessment data should be used to inform planning.
- The current action plan is appropriate. It considers the resources needed and includes a focus on the professional development of the subject leader and other staff.
- Leaders and managers have correctly identified the weaknesses in the pupils' locational knowledge and are making appropriate interventions to meet these needs.

Subject issue

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

- Geography helps pupils to have a very good understanding of their school and local communities. They understand what makes a community integrated and what part they have to play in this.

- Geography teaching encourages pupils to understand their roles and responsibilities as citizens.
- The focus on philosophical and critical thinking gives pupils the confidence to raise questions about environmental and topical issues that concern them, although they lack the locational knowledge to put their questions into a real context.
- The emphasis on education for sustainable development encourages pupils to think about the global impact of their own actions.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- supporting teachers with their development of subject-specific knowledge
- widening pupils' locational knowledge and understanding
- ensuring the curriculum is more closely linked to the progressive development of pupils' knowledge and skills
- developing pupils' awareness of faith, cultural and socio-economic issues in particular locations outside their own community.

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

Sonya Williamson
Her Majesty's Inspector