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Mrs S Clothier
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Dear Mrs Clothier

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 29 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 focused on 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 two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is inadequate.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is satisfactory at Key Stage 1 but inadequate at Key Stage 2.

- In the reception class and in Key Stage 1, effective use is made of the outdoor environment to enable pupils to learn about their locality. Health and Safety aspects are often woven into the lessons to raise the awareness of young children about dangers posed, for example, by the busy main road outside the school or the local river.

- Pupils make best progress in the subject in the lower school. At Key Stage 2, there is insufficient coverage of geography to enable pupils to achieve.
- Geography at Key Stage 2 often provides a context for learning in other subjects. Pupils have few in-depth opportunities for progressively developing their knowledge, skills and understanding in geography.
- Pupils remain unclear about what geography is. They are confident in explaining that history is about the past but have not experienced sufficient geography to differentiate between it and other subjects such as history or science.
- By the time they leave school, most pupils have developed some basic geographical skills. They are able to use an atlas and develop observational skills through their field visits. Gathering and enquiry skills are less well developed.
- Pupils have a satisfactory knowledge of their own locality. Their knowledge of places in the British Isles and the wider world is less well developed.
- Behaviour is generally good, although older pupils can become restless if they do not understand or cannot access the tasks set.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall.

- Teachers possess good generic teaching skills but have limited subject knowledge or experience. This does not always enable them to develop learning in geography fully by making best use of the resources available.
- Scrutiny of work, teachers' planning and discussions with pupils identified that geography is not taught frequently enough, or in sufficient depth, at Key Stage 2 to develop real learning in geography.
- Pupils receive 'episodes' of geography, rather than a systematically planned sequence of lessons, which leads to patchy learning and limits progress.
- The use of the outside classroom is a particularly strong feature of lessons in the lower school, but is less evident at Key Stage 2. Pupils enjoy these experiences.
- Assessment is not sufficiently focused on level descriptors to enable teachers to attain an accurate understanding of the progress pupils are making.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory overall.

- The planned curriculum provides adequate opportunities to cover the broad content that is statutorily required. However, at Key Stage 2, insufficient time is devoted to geography to cover requirements in sufficient depth.

- Some units of work do not allow pupils to study aspects in sufficient depth. Consequently pupils only develop a superficial knowledge and understanding of places and environments beyond their own immediate locality.
- Units of work, such as those on Rievaulx Abbey or the Titanic, provide a geographical context for learning in history rather than geography.
- QCA units provide a dated structure for teaching the subject. Some of these units have been modified but not in sufficient depth to develop good learning in geography.
- Good attempts have been made to link literacy with geography through the use of fiction and non-fiction stories as well as writing. However, the lack of teachers' subject expertise means that outcomes are not always geographical.
- Despite being identified in the planning, fieldwork has not always been completed, particularly at Key Stage 2. On several occasions, such as the visit to the coast, the focus has been on learning in science than geography, with pupils often observing rather than learning about the landscape.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is inadequate.

- In this small school, teachers cover many responsibilities and geography has not been considered a priority for development. There is an acknowledgement that there are weaknesses in provision.
- Local authority and subject support has not been utilised to develop teachers' subject expertise, the curriculum or learning in the subject.
- There has been no recent subject-specific professional development.
- Resources to support learning in the subject are shared between a consortium of four primary schools. However, these are not always the most appropriate or useful to support learning in geography.
- Insufficient consideration has been given to reviewing provision in the subject to enable strengths and weaknesses to be identified in order to initiate improvements.

Subject issues

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

- Currently, geography does not support community cohesion as effectively as it could. It is not identified in the planning.
- Lessons are better focused on the local, rather than the national or global, scale. Pupils have a poor knowledge of the wider world and the rich diversity in it.

- Links with a school on the Ivory Coast are at an early stage of development. Pupils have had little opportunity to use this to learn about life in a contrasting locality.
- Relationships are good and the school is a friendly and welcoming community. Pupils are cared for and looked after well. They enjoy working together and supporting each other.

Areas for improvement

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing a teaching programme for geography, especially at Key Stage 2, which enables pupils to access real learn geography and not merely to provide a context for learning in other subjects
- ensuring that pupils are taught in greater depth about a range localities in order to provide a more balanced perspective of the wider world
- improving teachers' geographical expertise by utilising support and resources provided by the subject associations and the local authority.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for the next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector