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7 October 2009

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Dear Miss Caley

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 in classrooms, corridors and the portfolio of evidence; and observation of two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is satisfactory.

- Children get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. A wide range of first hand experiences is provided. Children explore some features of their school and local environment and have compared different localities by visiting the local post office and Ash End House Farm.

- Children are encouraged to ask questions and seek answers. They are able to draw and interpret simple maps and sequence journeys. For example, children were able to plot the route of Little Red Riding Hood's journey to grandma's house on a large floor map.
- Through exploration, children increase their understanding of different environments and recognise the changes the different seasons bring.
- By the end of Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils reach standards in line with national expectations. Most pupils make satisfactory progress in their learning.
- In Years 1 and 2, pupils have a satisfactory knowledge of themes they have studied. Through their study of Barnaby Bear, they know that the world extends beyond their locality. Pupils increase their understanding of different environments and climatic conditions. They know that they need to wear different types of clothing to suit the weather.
- Work in Years 3 and 4 builds soundly on this. Through the study of Rushall and Chembakolli and the increased development of map-work skills, pupils increase their knowledge of weather, settlements and locations.
- By the end of Key Stage 2, most pupils demonstrate secure knowledge of maps, rivers, mountains and coastal landscapes. Pupils also increase their awareness of environmental issues through the water topic. Fieldwork skills are developed appropriately following the visit to Blithfield Reservoir.
- Pupils are keen and interested in their work. Their behaviour is good and they respond well to clear classroom expectations. Relationships between adults and pupils are good.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching is satisfactory.

- In the lessons observed, work was suitably planned and previous learning was built on to extend pupils' thinking. Activities and resources were chosen to support lessons appropriately.
- Appropriate opportunities were provided for pupils to work in small groups, pairs or individually, ensuring access to a variety of learning techniques.
- Pupils' enjoyment and engagement increased when lessons were practical, interesting and challenging, such as when Year 6 pupils had the opportunity to handle and discuss the equipment used to climb in extreme mountain terrains.
- Gaps in pupils' knowledge sometimes prevent them from making increased rates of progress. For example, a significant number of pupils in Year 1 were unable to locate the four countries of the United Kingdom accurately on a map of the British Isles.
- Sometimes lessons attempted to cover too much ground. Consequently, explanations became too rushed and there was insufficient time to complete the planned tasks.

- Information and communication technology and visual resources are used appropriately and help to enliven the subject. Pupils are confident in using computers to record their work and for research.
- Staff are making good progress in developing and implementing the school's virtual learning environment. This is helping teachers to manage pupils' learning and monitor their progress. It also provides an effective means of communication between home and school. High regard is given to e-safety. Suitable websites and secure chat rooms are provided to support pupils' learning and engagement.
- Although work is marked regularly, there is no formal assessment or moderation of pupils' work in geography. Outcomes are not used to plan next steps in learning or to ensure that that knowledge and understanding develop progressively. As a result, there is not a secure enough understanding of how well pupils are doing and what needs to be done to help them progress.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The geography curriculum has appropriate breadth and balance in the main. Planning is suitably detailed and designed to build on prior learning. However, some geographical skills are not developed sufficiently throughout the school.
- Pupils' understanding of their own immediate locality is good. However, knowledge and understanding of places and significant environments beyond the United Kingdom are not covered in sufficient depth.
- The curriculum ensures that pupils have a secure understanding of some environmental issues and are aware of the need to reduce, reuse and recycle.
- There are good cross-curricular links with other subjects, particularly English, history and design and technology. For example, pupils in Year 3 made good-quality three dimensional models illustrating different possible locations for the siting of Roman towns.
- Literacy links and opportunities for extended writing are increasing. For example, one Year 2 pupil shared a fluent, detailed written summary of the information that he had found out about China and was able to talk confidently about his work.
- Fieldwork experiences around the school, in Stourport and at The Black Country Museum are valued highly and contribute positively to the subject and pupils' learning.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is satisfactory.

- Subject leadership is improving rapidly following the appointment of a keen subject leader.
- Accurate self-evaluation has been used to pinpoint strengths and weaknesses in the subject and identify appropriate areas for development.
- Resources for the subject have been evaluated. As a result, new maps and atlases have been purchased to replace outdated stock. However, there is a shortage of Ordnance Survey maps to support learning for older pupils.
- There has been no formal programme of monitoring and evaluation in recent years.
- The subject leader has subscribed, or is affiliated, to professional bodies and associations which inform her about current issues in geography. She has not had the opportunity to attend training to help her to develop her subject leadership role or establish links with other subject leaders.

Subject issue

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

- A good range of community cohesion activities is promoted within the immediate locality. However, pupils' understanding of different UK and world localities is less strong because these are not taught in sufficient depth.
- No evaluation has been carried out to determine the impact that these activities have on pupils' understanding or learning about issues relating to community cohesion.
- 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 schemes of work.
- Relationships are good. There are very positive interactions between all pupils and staff.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- revising the curriculum planning to provide increased opportunities to develop, in greater depth, pupils' knowledge and understanding of places and significant environments beyond the United Kingdom
- identifying explicitly how the geography curriculum and related classroom experiences can contribute to community cohesion
- devising and implementing simple assessment procedures to monitor pupils' progress and help teachers build on pupils' prior skills and increase the rate of progress
- monitoring and evaluating the curriculum to ensure appropriate progression in geography throughout 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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for the next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Paul Weston
Her Majesty's Inspector