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9 October 2009

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Dear Ms Cliff

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 30 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; learning walks around the school; and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is outstanding.

Achievement in geography

Achievement is outstanding and standards are significantly above national expectations in geography at the end of Key Stage 1 and 2.

- Pupils make excellent progress in gaining geographical skills, knowledge and understanding as they move through the school.
- Pupils are extremely enthusiastic about learning geography. Their behaviour is very good, reflecting teacher's high expectations. Pupils happily engage in high-quality, collaborative activities that help them to learn more about the world.

- Pupils develop excellent thinking and learning skills and benefit greatly from the extensive range of opportunities they have to develop their map work and fieldwork skills and to use information and communication technology (ICT) in real world situations. This ensures they are very well equipped to undertake their own geographical investigations and to work with increasing levels of independence.
- Pupils develop their own sense of identity, self-esteem and concern for other people and places extremely well through their studies of geography.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children get off to an excellent start in geography. Carefully designed first-hand activities use the internal and external environment extremely effectively to ensure children begin to gain knowledge and understanding of the world. Assessment data show that children make very good progress in their learning from low starting points.
- In Year 1, walks in the local environment are used to develop high-level observational and recording skills. In Year 2, pupils visit a contrasting seaside locality in the United Kingdom and begin to discover more about distant places from a range of secondary sources.
- Pupils develop a very good sense of place and demonstrate an excellent understanding of where places are and whether they are similar to or different from each other.
- Pupils make very good progress in their learning in geography during Key Stage 2. This is because of the challenging teaching, excellent relationships and the very meaningful approaches to geography used in the school.
- Pupils have an excellent knowledge of topical and environmental issues and a very good understanding of human and physical geography at a variety of scales: local, national and global. They leave Year 6 as confident, independent learners with a range of geographical enquiry skills and excellent locational knowledge.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching is outstanding.

- Teaching teams plan very high-quality learning experiences which cater effectively for all pupils' needs. They have a very clear understanding of what constitutes good learning in geography.
- Teachers capture pupils' interest and enthusiasm. Excellent use is made of a range of highly appropriate resources, including ICT, to stimulate learning.
- Teaching assistants provide invaluable support to help pupils develop geographical skills, knowledge and understanding.
- Pupils are fully engaged and appropriately challenged in active learning activities inside and outside the classroom.

- Geographical enquiry approaches are a particular strength in the school. They are used to ensure learning experiences are memorable and meaningful.
- Pupils are encouraged to ask as well as to answer geographical questions. Very good opportunities are provided for pupils to think, solve problems, look at real issues and confidently share their views and opinions with others.
- All of the geography teaching observed during the visit was either good or outstanding. Where the teaching was outstanding, the sequence of lessons and activities was planned extremely well to ensure progressive learning and the acquisition of skills. High-quality questioning involved all pupils. Opportunities to discuss collaboratively allowed pupils to reflect on their targets and their learning.
- Assessment is rigorous. Pupils' work is regularly and comprehensively marked by teachers who provide detailed geography-specific advice on how to improve in the subject.
- Robust end of year assessment information is used to ensure the school has an extremely accurate view of progress and attainment in geography.
- External moderation, with two local secondary school geography departments, has been used very effectively to moderate the accuracy of the school's judgements for higher-achieving pupils.
- The school is aware that some teachers make very good use of targets to ensure pupils understand what they are trying to learn in geography. However, this approach is not used consistently across the school.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

- Topics and themes are carefully selected in the Early Years Foundation Stage and at Key Stage 1 to provide a firm foundation for the development of geographical knowledge, understanding and skills. This is effectively extended in breadth and depth through a two-year cycle of curriculum units in Key Stage 2.
- The geography curriculum is constantly reviewed and enhanced to ensure it provides a relevant context for learning. As a result, it is flexible and responsive. This means pupils are aware of topical issues and can participate in opportunities, such as those associated with the school's growing number of global links.
- Fieldwork is a very strong feature of provision. Pupils of all ages are provided with excellent opportunities to learn from first-hand experiences on day, overnight and residential visits.
- There is a strong emphasis on geography at a local, national and global scale but the European dimension of the geography curriculum is currently underdeveloped.

- The school has an extensive range of ICT equipment. This is used very effectively by pupils to support their learning and communicate the results of their investigations. During the visit, Year 1 pupils used a 'smart touch' table to recreate a recent journey around the local area. Year 2 pupils used portable ICT equipment to search for information about a village in Mexico and programmable toys to find their way around it. Year 3 and 4 pupils used laptops to produce a table of comparative data about the weather.
- Extremely high-quality displays around the school celebrate the outstanding geography curriculum and pupils' growing knowledge and understanding of the world.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is outstanding.

- Staff at the school work tirelessly together to continue to improve the quality of geography and ensure pupils 'aspire and achieve to the very best'.
- The subject leader makes extremely effective use of available benchmarking and networking activities, including subject association guidance and resource materials, to enhance practice in the school.
- The subject leader has a clearly defined role in the robust monitoring and evaluation of geography throughout the school. Extremely accurate annual self-assessments are used to identify strengths and areas for further development.
- The subject leader has a detailed understanding of progression in geography. Her thorough analysis of pupils' work, teachers' planning, observations of teaching and discussions with staff and pupils enable her to assess curriculum coverage and the quality of pupils' learning in geography with great precision.
- Progress and attainment data are collected and robustly analysed to identify trends and seek reasons for differences in pupils' performance.
- The school demonstrates an excellent capacity to continue to improve its work in geography.

Subject issue

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

- Community cohesion is embedded throughout the geography curriculum. Audits and policies have been used extremely effectively to ensure there is a very strong link between teaching, learning and the curriculum in geography and community cohesion.
- The breadth of the geography curriculum and the issues-based approach to personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) have been

skilfully designed to complement each other. Together, they provide an excellent range of opportunities for pupils to learn from and about their school, as well as the local, national and international community.

- The school places great emphasis on issues related to diversity, sustainability, poverty and social justice and is using geography to influence pupils' attitudes and values positively. This ensures that staff and pupils demonstrate an excellent understanding of how places, people, cultures and economies are interrelated.
- Pupils are very actively engaged in taking responsible action as local and global citizens. They have been instrumental in improving their own school environment and have recently established their own allotment. Pupils have also been involved in improving the quality of play spaces in their local community and sharing this work with other local schools and councillors. They raise funds for a number of local and international charities, including Promised Dreams and Oxfam.
- The school has established good links with schools in India and Dubai. Pupils' extensive use of ICT means they can regularly exchange photographs and information by email with children of their own age to enhance their learning about other localities.
- The excellent provision of memorable first and second-hand learning experiences, through the use of visits and visitors from different communities, and the extensive use of ICT, ensure that pupils are provided with a wealth of opportunities to compare similarities and differences and experience a range of places and cultures in geography lessons.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the use of targets to ensure all pupils understand what they are trying to learn in geography
- ensuring that pupils develop a greater knowledge and understanding of the geography of Europe and its many rich and diverse cultures.

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

Angela Milner
Her Majesty's Inspector