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Ms M Dodgeson
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Dear Ms Dodgeson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 6 October 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 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 inadequate overall.

- Geography teaching focuses mainly on geographical skills. Therefore, pupils are familiar with atlases and maps and they are able to identify and locate a range of places as widespread as New Zealand, Brazil and France. However, they wrongly assume that Africa is a country and that America is the United States rather than a continent.

- Many of the places pupils talked about were just names on a map or the globe rather than a real place which they could talk about with any conviction.
- Pupils have few opportunities to progressively develop their knowledge and understanding in geography.
- Geography frequently provides a context for learning in other subjects, especially history and science. Pupils remain unclear about what geography is and often confuse it with other subjects, reflecting their overall lack of understanding.
- Pupils make best progress in the lower school because teachers make more frequent use of the outdoor environment. These pupils are encouraged to look at changes in the locality and the landscape, often as part of work in science or history.
- Pupils develop some basic observational skills in the lower school but these are not built on in later years because there is an insufficient focus on understanding places.
- Work in books shows that poor presentation and writing skills hold some pupils back, especially boys. These pupils leave much work unfinished.
- Pupils are generally well behaved in lessons. They enjoy opportunities to work practically, particularly in the outdoor environment. Attitudes are positive when their interest is engaged.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching is inadequate.

- There is a lack of geographical expertise among the staff which means they are insecure in teaching geography. As a result, geographical knowledge and understanding are poorly developed.
- Teachers' planning varies greatly between classes. In many cases there is little indication of how geography learning is to be delivered and developed.
- Pupils are often occupied by the routine tasks set rather than challenged.
- All pupils are often required to complete the same task which results in some individuals struggling, while others find the work easy.
- Resources are not often used to best effect to bring out learning in geography. Topical events in the news are rarely used to engage pupils' interest and bring learning to life.
- Teachers use information and communication technology in lessons as a source of information for pupils but do not use it to encourage thinking, speaking and presentation skills.
- Pupils are unaware of how well they are doing in geography. Marking does not identify specifically how they can improve their learning.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is inadequate.

- Schemes of work vary in quality and there is no evidence of how pupils' learning in geography is to be progressively developed. Units vary in quality; some are merely a list of what is expected to be covered. A small minority provide clearer evidence for how the learning is to develop. There is no consistency of approach across classes or units
- The curriculum does not look in sufficient depth at issues which impact on pupils' everyday lives and the world around them. Units of work, such as the one on water, have the potential to enable pupils to learn about why water is such a precious resource. Equally, they could investigate the impact that flooding has on communities and what can be done to prevent this. These real issues are not explored in depth.
- The Year 6 unit on the environment and global warming provides a good example of how geography and science can be interwoven into a cohesive and detailed unit of work. However, this is the exception and in many units there is a paucity of geography. The location often provides a context for learning in other subjects.
- Fieldwork remains underdeveloped. The outdoor environment is used to some good effect in the lower school. Elsewhere, opportunities are lost to make best use of outdoor learning experiences because teachers are unaware how best to exploit these opportunities to learn about geography.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is inadequate.

- There has been a lack of continuity of tenure by successive subject leaders. As a result, geography has received little support in recent years and has not been developed or improved.
- Strategic planning to develop the subject is a list of good intentions. Objectives are vague with no real evidence as to how the subject is to develop or, more crucially, how teachers' subject expertise is to be improved.
- Subject leaders have been unaware of where they could get help or support to develop geography. The resources and support provided by the subject associations have not been used.
- There has been little monitoring of the quality of provision in geography. As a result, there is little understanding of weaknesses in provision or how these can be improved.

Subject issues

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

- Community cohesion is not identified in the planning for geography. Since the curriculum is based on skills, there are too few opportunities for pupils to explore and understand issues linked to diversity, interdependence and sustainability.
- Although pupils can identify many places, they know little about these places and their rich diversity or culture.
- There are few opportunities to explore topical issues which raise awareness of the world beyond the confines of the Pennine valleys in which these pupils live. As a result, many pupils still have an insular outlook on the world which can lead to stereotypical views of other people and places.
- Pupils have a strong sense of community and are proud of their school and their village. They show respect for each other and for visitors.

Areas for improvement

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- re-establishing the confidence of teachers in how to teach geography by providing suitable resources which will support and inform their teaching
- developing teachers' subject expertise by making use of the support and advice provided by the subject associations
- developing the role of the subject leader in order that he/she is confident in supporting improvements in provision and monitoring progress
- developing a geography curriculum which is relevant to pupils and allows geographical knowledge and understanding to be delivered as effectively as skills.

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