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Dear Mrs Daniels

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 16 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 three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement is good.

- Pupils enter the school with a range of abilities, a number having special educational needs and/or disabilities. An increasing number of pupils have English as an additional language. From these starting points, pupils achieve well both by the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.
- Girls do slightly better than boys in Key Stage 1 but by the end of Key Stage 2 achievement in geography is more equal.

- In the Foundation Stage, pupils are introduced to seasonal variations and begin an exploration of Australia. They make good progress in Key Stage 1 and have a growing understanding of both the physical and human features of their own locality, while developing early enquiry-based and mapping skills.
- Pupils' increasing knowledge and understanding of places further afield makes effective use of their holiday experiences and the travels of Barnaby Bear to other countries and places, such as Italy, Ireland and Paris.
- By Year 6, pupils have developed good enquiry skills and have made good progress through Key Stage 2, building successively on earlier learning. Pupils are able to contrast the towns of Reading and Swanage, where fieldwork is undertaken. They have a good understanding of how climate varies around the world and its impact on communities.
- Pupils are animated learners, who behave well and respond enthusiastically to their teachers.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching is good.

- The range of teaching strategies adopted by teachers, in lessons observed, was at least good and sometimes outstanding.
- There was good subject rigour in the work planned for pupils. They were asked to think carefully and to enquire in depth when searching for ideas and answers to geographical topics. For example, when they were looking at the local environment in Year 1, pupils were asked to decide whether an aspect they saw represented a physical or a human geographical feature.
- Activities were paced well and sequenced very effectively to make the best use of learning opportunities.
- Teachers frequently made excellent use of pupils talking to each other for short periods of time to create really focused ideas and discussion.
- Excellent use was made of information and communication technology. For example, use of the interactive whiteboard, digital cameras in Year 1 and in a Year 6 class computers to research a future topic on mountains.
- Assessment was very effectively and skilfully built into the lessons. In a Year 3 class, pupils constructed maps of the school and its grounds and assessed each other's work. They valued each other's contributions, made very mature and sensible suggestions for improvements and identified where good work had been achieved.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly but written comments do not always reflect what they should do to further improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The schemes of work and short-term planning are good. These detailed documents provide a very effective basis for underpinning progression in pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills in geography and increases their awareness of the world around them.
- The schemes of work allow for the revisiting of key ideas, building on prior learning.
- New schemes of work are in the process of being drawn up as the school moves towards a more integrated curriculum.
- From an early age, pupils are encouraged through geography to understand their personal responsibilities, for example about their local environment.
- The involvement of older pupils in the planning of topics is exemplary, providing an excellent means for them to understand the next stages in their geographical learning.
- Excellent opportunities are provided for local, residential and fieldwork visits, to enhance pupils' learning. The school makes every effort to ensure that there are no barriers to all pupils attending the residential fieldwork in Swanage and nearly all pupils in Year 6 do so.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- Despite geography having had five subject leaders in the last six years, it has been led and managed well.
- The new subject leader is supported very well by your subject-specialist expertise, good schemes of work and an extensive subject handbook.
- There is a good range of resources to support geography and sufficient funds are set aside each year to refresh and to further enhance geographical materials.
- Pupils' views are frequently sought to help evaluate the effectiveness of geography.
- The school has had membership of a subject professional association for many years but does not yet capitalise on this as an aid to the subject leader's continuing professional development.
- The school has identified appropriate action points for the further development of geography in its three-year subject plan. This includes, for example, achieving a greater understanding of the impact of climate change and achieving the eco-schools silver award.

Subject issue

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

- Pupils learn well together in the classroom and specific support for pupils who are early English language learners is effective and targeted well.
- Pupils' knowledge of their local community is good and the similarities and differences between their community and those of other regions and further afield is understood well.
- The school recognises the importance of community cohesion and seeks to broaden pupils' experiences through a range of activities in geography, encompassing visits from speakers of different faiths and cultures and a developing link with a school in Zambia.
- Community cohesion, although implicitly present in the curriculum and geography planning, is not yet specifically identified.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include the need to:

- ensure that the rigour in geography is not lost as the school moves towards an integrated curriculum
- monitor the progress of pupils' outcomes in geography, especially to ensure that boys make as much progress as girls
- ensure that teachers' comments on pupils' work clearly highlight where improvements are needed
- make effective links with other local geography coordinators and with subject professional associations to maximise the professional development for the new subject leader in his role.

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

Jenny Smith
Additional Inspector