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Mrs E Devey  
Headteacher  
St John's Catholic Primary School  
Chapel Lane  
Lathom  
Ormskirk  
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Dear Mrs Devey

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 19 November 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.

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 inadequate.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is inadequate.

- Children enter the Reception class with levels of knowledge and understanding of the world typical for their age.
- Pupils make inadequate progress. They reach standards that are below national expectations in geography because teaching is not strong enough to tackle underachievement, challenge pupils and raise standards sufficiently in the subject.

- Teachers make satisfactory links between geography and other subjects, such as literacy, to provide a context for learning.
- Pupils have some understanding of places. However, this is not covered in sufficient detail to communicate a thorough understanding of what the place is like and what it is like to live there. The differences between countries and continents are also not clearly understood.
- Pupils are unclear about what geography is and sometimes confuse it with history, reflecting their overall lack of understanding.
- Pupils behave well and this made a significant contribution to their satisfactory progress in the lessons observed during the visit.
- Pupils enjoy working practically on field trips and outdoors in the Early Years Foundation Stage exploring geographical ideas, features and processes.

### Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching of geography is inadequate.

- The quality of teaching observed was satisfactory. However, the quality of pupils' learning over time is inadequate when evidence from their workbooks and discussions with the inspector are taken into account.
- Teachers lack geographical expertise which means they are unsure about how to teach geography well. Consequently, pupils' geographical knowledge and understanding are weak.
- The school does not have a full range of appropriate geographical resources, including information and communication technology, at present. Some resources are very old with stereotypical and outdated images of different countries and cultures.
- Books, maps and images used on interactive whiteboards are used for information but do not always improve pupils' learning or sufficiently develop their understanding of places.
- Assessment information is very rarely used to plan for the range of pupils' needs in classes. Pupils of different ages and abilities are often required to complete the same tasks.
- All work is marked regularly. However, comments do not routinely provide pupils with guidance on how to improve. Pupils do not accurately know how well they are doing in geography.

### Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The school has worked effectively to develop the curriculum. Geography curriculum planning meets statutory requirements and links between subjects are strengthening to provide relevant contexts and raise levels of interest for pupils.

- Links to the National Curriculum are increasingly secure. Planned activities are checked against the programme of study to ensure progression and continuity through the school. Improvements to the curriculum are too recent to have had a significant impact on standards in geography.
- Planned homework projects support learning in a variety of subjects, including geography.
- Fieldwork skills are not planned for systematically and progression in skills, knowledge and understanding linked to fieldwork is limited at present.
- The school has an effective eco-schools committee involving pupils of all ages who ensure recycling rates increase, energy usage reduces and the school environment is treated with respect.

### Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is inadequate.

- Until very recently, there has not been subject leadership in geography owing to significant staffing issues faced by the school. You have worked effectively to appoint new staff and prepare them for their new roles as middle leaders.
- A suitable plan has been written by the school to raise standards in geography but this has not yet been implemented.
- The geography coordinator does not currently have opportunities to observe teaching and learning directly, audit resources or to analyse data from geography assessments. He has recently received your support in scrutinising pupils' workbooks. However, this has not yet had an impact on standards.
- The subject associations' websites are not used to enhance or select resources or develop teachers' ability to teach geography well.
- Procedures for the assessment of pupils in geography are currently inadequate. Leaders and teachers do not have a clear view about standards and progress in the subject because pupils are not assessed effectively.

### Subject issue

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

- Planning for community cohesion is not linked to the geography curriculum at present.
- Pupils have a limited understanding of life in different places outside their local area. For example, they knew Liverpool was a big city with lots of buildings and people, but they didn't know that the population was diverse and the significant Chinese community had an impact upon the city's culture.

- Topical events in the news and from other countries are not used to engage pupils or bring learning to life.
- Within the school, pupils have a strong sense of community and show respect and understanding of each other's differences.
- The school's travel plan is in place but was not devised or researched by the pupils to develop a deeper understanding of their own community's needs.

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

- re-establish the confidence of teachers in how to teach geography well by providing suitable resources which will inform their teaching
- provide the geography coordinator with opportunities to monitor the quality of provision
- provide high-quality, professional development for all staff to improve expertise through the support and resources available from the subject associations and other agencies
- systematically and logically develop pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills through regular and well-planned fieldwork opportunities.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop geography in 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

Liam Trippier  
Her Majesty's Inspector