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Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Simpson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 19 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 the observation of one lesson.

The overall effectiveness of geography is inadequate.

New structures for the teaching of geography through a thematic curriculum are not developed sufficiently to meet statutory requirements. Consequently, pupils do not achieve as well as they should in all areas of geography.

Achievement in geography

Achievement is inadequate.

- Significant gaps in curriculum provision mean that pupils do not experience all aspects of the subject. As a result, their achievement is inadequate overall.

- Pupils' knowledge of places and geographical features, particularly within the British Isles, is weak and their awareness of similarities and differences between different regions, countries and continents is limited.
- Pupils in mixed-age classes make satisfactory progress in developing geographical skills and knowledge through the study of themes relating to environmental issues and sustainable development. They acquire basic fieldwork skills, for example, through local walks and a river survey.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children make a sound start in geography. Recent improvements to the outdoor learning area have increased opportunities for children to explore their environment and learn about their school surroundings. Assessment information shows that children reach the levels that are expected for their age in gaining knowledge and understanding of their world.
- Pupils in Years 1 and 2 can describe the use of different buildings in their village as a result of fieldwork investigation. They are also able to identify similarities and differences between their homes and those found in other parts of the world.
- Key Stage 2 pupils gain a satisfactory understanding of the importance of rainforests in providing food and natural habitats for many different creatures. They know about some of the consequences of deforestation and can present arguments for saving the rainforest.
- Pupils are enthusiastic when talking about the geography they have studied. They particularly enjoy working together in groups. Pupils were eager to study maps and atlases during discussion and reflected that they did not often get the chance to use maps to help them understand where places are.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching is satisfactory.

- Teachers use generic skills effectively to deliver the geographical component of thematic schemes of work.
- Planning for geography is variable. Where teachers identify the objectives for learning clearly, pupils are able to make satisfactory gains in their learning. However, there are instances where the teaching of geographical concepts is superficial, reflecting teachers' lack of subject knowledge.
- Samples of work show that pupils experience a range of activities including individual and group work, to answer questions such as 'how could the village green be improved?'
- Pupils use information and communication technology to present data collected in tables and charts and conduct investigations, for example, to find out how much of their household waste could be recycled. Access to digital cameras enables pupils to record observations during fieldwork and to annotate relevant features on their return to class

- The use of maps and atlases to support the teaching of geography is limited. For example, maps used for locating places and features are of poor quality and atlases are used infrequently to locate areas of study.
- Assessment information is not currently collected to compare the progress made by pupils compared with national benchmarks. Marking is brief and does not explain how pupils can improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum is inadequate.

- The school has taken steps to increase the relevance of its curriculum and adopt a thematic approach to learning foundation subjects, including geography. Plans for implementing a 'curriculum for life' have not proceeded at the expected pace. Consequently, the contribution of geography to the curriculum does not meet statutory requirements.
- The curriculum is currently under development. Initial structures are in place but teachers have not yet planned the specific detail of all schemes of work to ensure the progressive development of pupils' geographical knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Geography topics are chosen to form part of themes of study. Some are designed well to motivate and engage pupils. For example, the Key Stage 2 unit, 'Black Diamonds', makes good links between local history and geography and enables pupils to learn about their cultural heritage.
- Displays are not used routinely to increase and celebrate pupils' knowledge and understanding of the world.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is inadequate.

- Successive changes in subject leadership have limited progress in establishing a strategic and systematic approach to curriculum development.
- Subject leaders have been unaware of the resources and support provided by the subject associations to help the development of geography across the curriculum.
- A more coherent approach to mapping geography provision across the curriculum is under development to build progression into the development of geographical skills and knowledge.
- There has been little monitoring of the quality of provision in geography. As a result, subject leaders have only recently identified the gaps in the curriculum.

Subject issue

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

- Community cohesion is not identified in the planning for geography. Consequently, opportunities are missed to develop pupils' understanding of issues relating to diversity and interdependence.
- Although the school has identified where links might be made with international communities in the school action plan, there are currently limited opportunities for pupils to explore in depth the diverse nature of different communities beyond the immediate locality.
- Pupils have a satisfactory understanding of their local community. They are positive about the role they play within their school community and recognise the value of working together.
- Opportunities are increasing for pupils to think about the consequences of their actions on the global community, for example through the theme of 'Waste Not Want Not'.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- linking thematic topics of study more precisely to geographical knowledge and skills so that all statutory requirements are met
- using assessment criteria to ensure that progression in pupils' knowledge is built into the geography curriculum
- establishing ways of checking pupils' progress in geography to evaluate the impact of provision on their learning
- developing teachers' knowledge of geography so that they can develop pupils' learning with greater confidence.

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

Sara Morrissey
Her Majesty's Inspector