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Mr A Ramanandi
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mr Ramanandi

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 13 January 2010 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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is outstanding.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is outstanding.

- Pupils have a strong knowledge and understanding of the links between human and physical geography and the impact of one on the other; they have a good understanding of environmental issues and what part they have to play as responsible citizens.
- Pupils' locational knowledge is outstanding and their frequent use of atlases and maps means they are also aware of relative locations as well as those of neighbouring regions and countries.

- Pupils know and understand an extensive variety of geographical vocabulary and use these terms well in their written and oral work.
- They can identify patterns and processes and make links between data presented in a variety of ways including maps, charts and diagrams.
- Pupils have very well-developed, independent learning skills. Teachers encourage them to ask geographical questions which are then often debated by the class. This gives them confidence to express their opinions and enhances their speaking and listening skills.
- The standards pupils attain are very high and their learning and progress are outstanding.
- Pupils' personal development is also outstanding. They are cooperative and enthusiastic learners. Their geographical and personal achievements prepare them very well for the future.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching of geography is outstanding.

- A very wide range of teaching and learning strategies is used; this pays good attention to pupils' preferred learning styles and fosters excellent relationships.
- The resources used by teachers are up to date and topical. Geography in the news is discussed frequently with pupils.
- Pupils say they feel very well supported by staff if they find the work hard: levels of challenge are very high. However, resources are not always fully adapted to meet the needs of different groups.
- Pupils are engaged well with their learning. As a result, teachers spend much good quality time in discussion with individuals and groups of pupils and this ensures that pupils know what to do to improve.
- Pupils enjoy frequent opportunities to learn using enquiry approaches. They work successfully, both collaboratively and independently, on these tasks.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge. They work cooperatively to share the best ideas and research new topics thoroughly to inform their planning.
- Teachers correct common pupil misconceptions well. They choose examples carefully to counteract common stereotypical views, for example, about lifestyles in less economically developed countries.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is good.

- The units of work meet the needs of pupils well, especially in terms of making links across topics and with other subjects, in deepening

understanding between classes and in ensuring that learning is topical and relevant.

- Some geographical themes are overemphasised at the expense of others.
- Progression in skills is planned clearly into the curriculum.
- Fieldwork is integrated very well into most units of work and, where first-hand experience is not appropriate, pupils benefit from visits and visitors.
- Fieldwork within the school grounds, in the local community and across the wider local region supports pupils' understanding of learning at a range of scales and develops their investigative skills.
- The curriculum promotes pupils' thinking about sustainability, global issues and community so that they consider how best to act to help others and how to change their behaviour if needed.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- The quality of pupils' work, teachers' planning and marking, resources and displays are monitored well.
- Monitoring does not yet include a sufficient emphasis on the views of pupils, the rigour of assessment or the relative strengths and areas for development in pupils' geographical learning. However, it is well used to inform whole-school improvement.
- There has been little subject-specific training. However, joint working among staff alongside senior leaders' input to enhance teaching and learning support teachers' professional needs well.
- The subject leader is well informed about geographical issues and has a clear understanding of progression throughout the school. Leadership ensures the provision meets pupils' needs well and that changes are well considered.
- The high levels of achievement in geography, the ongoing enhancements to provision and teachers' excellent subject knowledge and understanding mean that leadership shows outstanding capacity for improvement.

Subject issue

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

- Pupils have a very strong awareness of similarities and differences within their own community and around the world, although their understanding of contrasts within the United Kingdom and across Europe is less strong.
- Community cohesion is promoted actively in geography and is at the heart of the approach to learning. Learning is often collaborative, builds from pupils' own knowledge of the local area and celebrates difference.

- Geography makes a major contribution to community cohesion through the aspects chosen for study including providing themes for assemblies as well as by following up whole-school community cohesion developments in lessons.
- Fieldwork, recycling initiatives, links with a neighbouring school, a school in Zambia and a developing link with a school in London all contribute to pupils' depth of understanding and provide lively contexts for learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- further increasing opportunities to make the curriculum topical and broaden the range of study
- developing monitoring and evaluation strategies as well as their impact on subject-specific improvement planning
- refining assessment systems and their links to subject evaluation.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to improve 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

Sonya Williamson
Her Majesty's Inspector