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Mrs J Duffy
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Duffy

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 12 February 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 pupils' work; learning walks around the school building and grounds; and observations of two lessons and an eco-assembly.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is good.

- Pupils make good progress in gaining geographical skills, knowledge and understanding as they move through the school and meet standards above national expectations in geography.
- Pupils are enthusiastic about learning geography. They particularly value the meaningful learning experiences gained from the extensive use of the school building and grounds as well as local and residential fieldwork.

- Pupils develop good thinking, mapwork, fieldwork and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. These skills equip them well to undertake independent geographical enquiries.
- Geographical activities help pupils to understand the similarities and differences between places. They have a well-developed sense of identity and self-esteem and understand that they are part of a local, national and global community. They demonstrate responsible action showing their care for each other and the local and global environment.
- Pupils are polite, respectful and well behaved. They enjoy learning about the world through well-planned, collaborative activities inside and outside the classroom.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching is good.

- Teachers have relevant subject knowledge and understand what constitutes good learning in geography.
- Good or better teaching across the school captures the pupils' imagination and maximises their learning in geography. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 were finding out about the similarities and differences between the Arctic and the Antarctic and the place they lived in. Their eco-assembly showed how the planet is changing and what everyone could do to improve it. Pupils in upper Key Stage 2 were considering the impact of flooding on different communities and the need for more effective flood-prevention schemes.
- High-quality questioning involves all pupils, and opportunities are provided for pupils to think, solve problems, look at real issues and confidently share their views and opinions.
- The school has a good range of geographical resources and good use is made of ICT in teaching and learning. Excellent use is also made of the school's own grounds which include allotments, a weather station, a wildflower meadow, a range of different surfaces and habitats and a forest school environment with access to its own brook.
- Teachers keep records of the progress pupils make in their geographical learning and provide parents with very detailed reports. The school does not as yet maintain an assessment portfolio of samples of pupils' geographical work linked to National Curriculum levels.
- Although books are marked regularly, feedback comments are not always focused sharply on pupils' next steps in geography.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is outstanding.

- Curriculum planning ensures curriculum coverage and provides a highly relevant context for learning.

- The curriculum is tailored very well to meet the needs of pupils in this school community. It makes excellent use of the local and natural environment to foster pupils' enthusiasm for learning about and caring for the world.
- Very good use is made of visits and visitors to raise pupils' awareness of local, national and global issues, diversity, cultures and traditions.
- The curriculum is flexible and responsive. It is designed to ensure that pupils are very aware of topical issues and can participate in available opportunities to enrich and enhance learning. For example, involvement in an online project to celebrate the bicentenary of Charles Darwin in 2009 led to the forging of good links with a school in the Red Sea area of Egypt. Recent work on the restoration of Lea Quarry has been shared with a number of conservation agencies.
- Pupils make a positive contribution to their own environment. Eco-warriors are very proactive. The school has gained a number of geography-related awards including a silver Eco award and a gold award for its travel plan.
- High-quality displays around the school celebrate the outstanding geography curriculum and pupils' growing knowledge and understanding of the world.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- As headteacher, you promote the links between teaching, learning, the curriculum and community cohesion with enthusiasm. You teach and lead geography effectively, ensuring it has a prominent place in the school's curriculum and that the excellent facilities you have developed at your school can be shared with others.
- There is a good recently approved geography policy. You have a clear understanding of progression through your formal and informal analysis of teachers' planning, scrutiny of pupils' work and observations and discussions with colleagues and pupils.
- Extensive use is made of local partnerships and networks to develop geographical work further, but the school has not as yet used the support and resources available from subject associations.
- The school is continually striving to improve the quality of geography and demonstrates a good capacity to continue to improve its work.

Subject issue

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

- Community cohesion is embedded in school life and promoted through geography very well. The school makes outstanding use of local contacts

and a number of active partnerships to enrich learning and support teaching.

- The school places great emphasis on the importance of diversity and inclusion at a school, local, national and international scale and is using geography to positively influence pupils' attitudes and values.
- The excellent provision of memorable first- and second-hand learning experiences ensures that pupils are provided with opportunities to compare attitudes and values and experience a range of cultures and places.
- The school has good links with a nearby urban school including pupils from a diversity of backgrounds. Links with schools in Egypt and Guinea are also used effectively in geography.
- Pupils have a good understanding of environmental and sustainability issues and get involved in taking responsible action. For example, growing their own vegetables for sale at Café Preen.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the consistency of feedback on pupils' written work to ensure it informs them how to improve their work in geography
- developing an assessment portfolio of pupils' work, annotated against National Curriculum levels, to provide detailed evidence of geographical attainment and progress
- using the support and resources available from subject associations.

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

As I explained previously, 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 your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Angela Milner
Her Majesty's Inspector