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Dear Ms Ford

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 10 and 11 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 data; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of six lessons across all phases as well as one assembly.

Given the complex and varied needs of the pupils, geography supports their learning well and the overall effectiveness of the subject is good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is good overall.

- The school caters very well for a range of complex individual needs. Personalised support ensures that, overall, pupils make good progress in their geographical learning from their starting points on entry, many of which are particularly low in comparison to national averages.

- In their primary phase, pupils particularly benefit from a practical approach to their learning which enables them, for example, to recognise different perspectives when looking at landscapes from ground level or on a map.
- Less able pupils are able to recognise that places are different. More able pupils are able to list these differences, develop basic map skills and use grids to locate features.
- Across all phases, pupils are visually aware and can use atlases and maps with varying degrees of confidence. For example, they can research the location of volcanoes and place these accurately on a map. They are also able to explain and link this to plate movements, but struggle to express this effectively in writing.
- Pupils are more comfortable and more able to express themselves geographically through British Sign Language (BSL), their first language, than in less familiar written form. As a result, written examination outcomes do not always reflect actual ability. In the secondary phase, achievement remains good although final examination outcomes are below national averages.
- In lessons, through visual expression and signing, more able pupils make clearer progress in their learning than those with more complex needs. This gap is less evident in their written work. Descriptive writing is common, reasoned argument more problematic.
- Many pupils continue to struggle to develop an effective command of technical geographical language since there are often no equivalent terms when using BSL. This can lead to some simplistic use of language which can impact on eventual outcomes but does not necessarily reflect the real level of their understanding.
- Pupils enjoy the frequent opportunities provided to work collaboratively. They are attentive in lessons. They also appreciate the need to be mutually supportive of one another, frequently signing in lessons to friends who may not have fully understood an instruction.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching is good overall.

- Pupils enjoy their geography lessons and all opt to take geography qualifications (Entry Level or GCSE) in Key Stage 4. Older pupils have identified that over the last few years lessons have become more enjoyable and involve a range of practical activities. There was much good and outstanding teaching observed which supported pupils well.
- These good and outstanding lessons had several common characteristics:
 - frequent use was made of visual stimuli, especially maps and photographs, to engage pupils and exemplify key aspects of study

- information and communication technology (ICT) was used to interact with pupils and engage them in sharing ideas and discussion
 - wherever possible, there was an emphasis on practical demonstration to consolidate understanding
 - instructions were exceptionally clear to avoid confusion or misunderstanding about the task or expected outcomes
 - education assistants (EAs) worked in close partnership with teachers and were highly effective in supporting learners to engage with the task.
- Good use is made of the outdoor environment to engage pupils in a practical way. In the secondary phase, visits into Derby or walks along a main road enable pupils to understand changing landscapes in their immediate locality. In the primary phase, exposure to the outdoor environment interests and excites young pupils and provides them with enjoyable real-life experiences, such as the 'Duckling Project'.
 - Opportunities for developing more in-depth writing are not always explored with more able pupils who are potentially capable of it. For example, pupils regularly collect data or use secondary sources to draw graphs. However, once completed, there is little evidence to suggest that trends have been analysed or discussed.
 - Pupils' progress is regularly assessed and recorded. Although a common framework and criteria are used, currently there is no effective moderation process to ensure accuracy across all classes. Work is marked on a regular basis.
 - Most pupils are aware of their targets and how well they are doing in the subject. They are less secure about what they need to do to improve.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is good overall.

- There is a planned curriculum across all phases which meets current requirements, including sufficient opportunities for pupils to develop fieldwork skills.
- The primary curriculum is based on QCDA units which have been adapted to meet the specific and complex needs of pupils. There is good coverage but progression in key concepts and skills is less clearly defined.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum has been remodelled to enable good exposure for pupils to key concepts such as interdependence, environmental interaction and sustainable development, place, space and scale. The European dimension is less clearly identified.
- Topical issues are used well to gain pupils' interest. Topics, such as flooding, global warming or the recent earthquake in Haiti, are seen as relevant to their lives and interesting to study.

- A key feature of the curriculum is the opportunity to re-visit topics across phases to build on previous learning. This is particularly important for many pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and who benefit from these opportunities to consolidate their learning.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good and there is also good capacity for improvement.

- The subject is well organised and managed by the two phase coordinators. The learning programme's clear structure supports non-specialists well.
- The coordinators work well as a team and their close cooperation supports progression between the primary and secondary phases. Recent curriculum changes at Key Stage 3 have been managed well.
- The small and compact nature of the school enables internal monitoring of provision to be reasonably effective. However, it currently does not inform strategic planning which focuses on organisational issues rather than development issues linked to staff's geographical expertise.
- Both coordinators make effective use of the support from the local authority. They keep up to date through attendance at network meetings which also allow sharing of ideas. The help and support provided by the subject associations has not been used.
- A good range of relevant resources are available to support the learning programme. There is a particular emphasis on practical resources, including ICT, as well as visual stimuli.

Subject issue

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

- There is a shared understanding that community cohesion is part of the geography curriculum and opportunities to support this are evident in some of the units of work.
- Pupils have a basic understanding of local and global issues. They are particularly interested in aspects, such as 'fair trade' and the differences between people, places and environments. They are less secure in recognising similarities.
- The school uses topical issues, such as the recent earthquake in Haiti, to develop pupils' understanding about the wider world around them.
- The European dimension is less well developed through geography and pupils have a limited understanding of their role as European citizens.
- Positive relationships in lessons promote a culture of care and cooperation. There is a strong sense of an inclusive community which supports pupils well.

- The school has developed links with Norway and, more recently, Kenya. Currently, these links are not used sufficiently to support learning in geography.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- reviewing the curriculum to include more specific opportunities to support community cohesion and develop the European dimension in particular
- using opportunities more frequently to develop extended writing skills, particularly for the more able
- making use of the support and resources provided by the subject associations to continue to improve provision in the classroom as well as develop non-specialists' geographical expertise
- ensuring that pupils are clear about what they need to do to improve as part of their next steps in learning.

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

Leszek Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector