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Ms L Lawson
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Lawson

Ofsted 2010-11 subject survey inspection programme: geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 6 May 2010 to look at work in geography.

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 and observation of three lessons, including outdoor learning for the youngest pupils.

The overall effectiveness of geography is outstanding.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is good.

- By Year 6, most pupils are working at or above national standards. Pupils throughout the school make at least good progress in their lessons.
- Pupils revisit and develop their geographical knowledge and understanding effectively because geography is a regular part of the curriculum. It sometimes leads the themed topic and is sometimes a smaller component.
- Pupils become confident at geographical enquiry. From an early age, they learn to be independent thinkers and to challenge each other's points of view, using maps, photographs and other geographical resources well to support their arguments.
- Learning is often outstanding because pupils understand their own local area very well and are able to compare and contrast it with other areas of the United Kingdom and places throughout the world.

- Younger pupils achieve well because they have good first-hand experiences, such as going on a 'bear hunt' in the school orchard. There they encountered a variety of terrain and squelched through mud, crossed a simulated river and experienced a mock snow storm. The map they subsequently painted showed how exceptionally effective this geographical learning was for the age group.
- Pupils' knowledge and understanding are good in terms of both physical processes, such as rivers, and of the impact of humans on various environments.
- A few pupils had too little appreciation of what people from other communities might add to their own.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching of geography is outstanding.

- Geography is taught exceptionally well as teachers have good subject knowledge and think of very imaginative ways to support their pupils' geographical learning.
- They encourage pupils to think of the questions they want to ask about other places and features, and skilfully devise activities that promote pupils' deepening understanding.
- Effective debate preparation was seen in a Year 3 class considering the proposition that 'recycling should be compulsory'.
- In an observed Year 4 lesson, pupils considered the merits of having a theme park built in their town. They began to master complex arguments effectively and to evaluate evidence regarding the impact on house prices, the environment, shopkeepers, children and citizens of various ages.
- Where processes, such as erosion and deposition in a river, prove hard for pupils to grasp, teachers effectively use techniques, such as group simulations, to aid understanding.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used very effectively to ensure pupils keep up to date with national and world events, such as the general election and the recent volcanic eruption in Iceland.
- A clear and workable framework is in place to assess pupils' progress against both set criteria and National Curriculum levels.
- Assessment is rigorous and is used effectively at the start of units, during lessons and at the end of units to ensure pupils' learning moves on rapidly.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is outstanding.

- The curriculum is outstanding because it meets all pupils' interests and needs exceptionally well. It enthuses pupils and uses practical ways to bring learning to life.

- Pupils enjoy a wide range of fieldwork and make the most of their beautiful location on the Severn and of the proximity to Gloucester docks and canal.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities have full access to fieldwork. Activities, such as attending school in forest classrooms and visiting the local caves, ensure all pupils get plenty of first-hand experience of techniques like observation, field-sketching and data-collection.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is outstanding.

- The constantly evolving and exciting curriculum takes pupils' changing interests into account. This makes extra work for staff but they enjoy tackling new subjects and motivating their pupils to know more about the wider world.
- The subject leader regularly checks that all elements of the National Curriculum are included.
- Each pupil's progress and attainment are recorded and analysed so the school has a clear view of where any gaps in knowledge occur. Prompt action is then taken to resolve them.
- The school is leading the work of the local cluster group to ensure the quality and security of assessment in geography and other foundation subjects are good.
- The school's action plan is detailed and items are dealt with in a timely fashion, demonstrating the school's excellent capacity to improve. This is also helped by the subject leaders' expert knowledge of the environmental aspects of geography.
- Effective leadership has encouraged teachers to have a real enthusiasm for geography and how they can prepare future well-informed citizens.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that all pupils appreciate how people from other places might enhance their local community.

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 under the URN for your school. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Mo Roberts
Her Majesty's Inspector