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Mr R Nodding
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Dear Mr Nodding

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 22 June 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 without their consent.

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, an assembly and a question and answer session between the School Council and a Tanzanian visitor.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is satisfactory overall.

- On the whole, pupils make satisfactory progress as they move through the school. Progress is better in the lower school where a strong emphasis is placed on developing geographical vocabulary as well as observational skills which help pupils to begin to identify the basic characteristics of places. These skills are supported well through a variety of visits and experiences outside the classroom.
- At Key Stage 2, pupils are able to use atlases effectively. They can locate places on a map and recall some basic facts about a country, such as France or Italy. However, they have too few opportunities to learn about places and geographical processes in greater depth.

- Geography frequently provides a context for learning in other subjects, such as English, history or science. Most pupils are unclear about what geography is and often confuse it with these other subjects. There is an overemphasis on developing skills and opportunities to develop good geographical knowledge and understanding are limited.
- Girls tend to outperform boys who are often let down by poor literacy and presentational skills.
- Pupils behave well in lessons. They particularly enjoy opportunities to work collaboratively and practically, especially in the outdoor environment.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching in geography is satisfactory.

- Teachers have good generic teaching skills but are less secure in teaching geographically. Subject knowledge is weak and planning identifies that they are unclear about what constitutes good learning in geography.
- Lessons are planned in detail but the geography focus is often on skills, vocabulary or basic facts; pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to enable them to study a place in depth.
- When pupils are asked to research about a country, the emphasis is often on basic factual recall, such as the main rivers or mountains, rather than an invitation to explore real issues, similarities or differences.
- Pupils are assessed regularly to establish whether they can ask geographical questions, use atlases and describe places. Although this is linked to level descriptors, it is less clear how secure the teachers are in assessing this accurately, especially when there is no portfolio of exemplars against which they can make comparisons.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly but comments rarely identify how they are expected to improve. Factual inaccuracies are not always corrected.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is only just satisfactory.

- The curriculum covers most aspects of the statutory requirements. A few units have a specific geography focus but, mostly, the subject is expected to be delivered as part of a creative, cross-curricular approach. This results in pupils getting mixed experiences and there is a lack of cohesiveness; apart from developing skills there is little progression in pupils' learning.
- Where geography is taught as part of a cross-curricular theme, it often provides a very limited background to work in another subject. For example, a map showing German-occupied Europe in the topic on World War 2 has only tenuous links with geography and was peripheral to the learning in the lesson. Such episodes do not provide sufficient quality opportunities to study geography in depth.
- Links established with partner schools in France and Tanzania are at an early stage of development but provide some limited opportunities to learn

about contrasting localities. The emphasis, however, is frequently on culture, customs and food rather than the geography of the place.

- Pupils get frequent opportunities to visit places such as Barnard Castle, the Killhope lead mining centre or Hamsterley Forest. Although they are usually able to locate where the place is they are visiting, they frequently gain more in terms of history or science learning, for example, than geography.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is satisfactory

- The annual audit of provision provides a basic outline of coverage but analysis of the quality of this provision is limited. It also fails to identify areas of weakness; for example the lack of opportunities to study geographical processes, such as rivers, at Key Stage 2 or the limited depth of study of places.
- The school is trying to raise the profile of the subject by making use of the links with schools in France and Tanzania to raise pupils' awareness of the wider world and promote the global dimension.
- The school has made some limited use of the resources and support provided by the subject associations.
- Teachers, as a whole, have had very limited exposure to relevant subject-specific training to tackle weaknesses in geographical knowledge and expertise. As a result, teachers have not been able to keep up-to-date with new ideas to enable them to teach and plan geography effectively.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the curriculum provides sufficient quality opportunities to enable pupils to study topical issues and places in greater depth
- using the resources and support provided by the subject associations to improve teachers' geography knowledge and confidence to enable them to plan and teach the subject more effectively
- making better use of the wide range of outdoor learning opportunities to support real learning in geography.

I hope that 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

Leszek Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector