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Mrs F Lark
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Lark

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 23 March 2012 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 including recent governing body minutes; analysis of pupils' work and a learning walk to see the pupils' work on display in classrooms. No geography lessons were being taught during the visit.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is satisfactory.

- The school does not currently have a system in place to ensure that it has an accurate view of geographical attainment when the pupils enter the school at the end of Key Stage 1.
- Pupils have a satisfactory knowledge of distant places and are able to use a range of maps and keys with confidence. Pupils' knowledge of the geography of the United Kingdom is satisfactory; they are aware of the component parts as well as capital cities and some main rivers.
- Appropriate use is made of the school's outdoor environment to support learning and pupils have made good land-use maps of the site. They have all taken part in redesigning the natural wildlife and forest school area that

is being developed on the school's boundary. In the past two years, however, overall fieldwork skills have not been a sufficient priority, especially at the end of Key Stage 2.

- Pupils say they enjoy learning about different places and researching and improving their geographical knowledge of places. They provided a good variety of geographical reasons for selecting another place where they might like to live.
- Pupils showed positive attitudes to geographical learning. All behaved well when they met with the inspector to discuss their learning. They were also observed behaving well in the dining hall and in the Sports Relief activities – which a local secondary school was leading on the day of the visit.
- From the available evidence, pupils obtain a basic geographical education which enables them to reach broadly average standards by the end of Year 6.

Quality of teaching in geography

The quality of teaching in geography is satisfactory.

- Teachers have appropriate subject knowledge and ensure that the pupils obtain basic coverage of the national curriculum orders for geography. The teaching leads to well-presented work but too much is very similar. This suggests that some of the more able pupils are not fully challenged and that the over reliance, in some classes, on worksheets is restricting how much pupils learn.
- Older pupils have some opportunities to investigate problems and remembered well the more controversial issues they have covered such as the topic of deforestation in the rainforests.
- Lessons are carefully sequenced to ensure coverage of the topics but do not always take enough note of pupils' prior learning experiences as assessment is not strong in the subject. This leads to some patchy understanding.
- Good use is made of an adequate range of resources, including information and communication technology (ICT). For example, pupils enjoyed watching their teacher use Google Earth to locate the local area and were able to discuss knowledgeably what they had seen.
- Too few assessment strategies are in place. Teachers are aware of this and have consequently all attended a related days' training recently.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- The previously integrated curriculum, in which geography was under-represented, is undergoing a thorough review to ensure that it is broad and more progressively builds on pupils' previous learning. However, as yet it lacks an appropriate emphasis on geographical enquiry.

- Geography, at an international and global scale, is reasonably well covered and pupils have a good knowledge of physical processes related to volcanoes and earthquakes; due in part to recent news coverage.
- Pupils are involved in taking positive action to improve their own school environment and are keen to recycle and to 'make things last' (sustainability). They discussed the use of solar panels in their locality, putting opposing views across with confidence.
- Links with other subjects, particularly numeracy and science were well used by pupils in their discussions. Links with ICT in their work were more limited.
- Displays around the school show the current curriculum and pupils' growing knowledge and understanding of the links between historical developments and human geography; as seen in their work on Victorian housing development and the links to the establishment of the railways.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is satisfactory.

- New management has identified the problems in the previous geography curriculum and has set about overhauling the subject. The geography policy, which is out of date, is in line for review in the new school-development plan.
- All staff have had professional training on the key skills they should be fostering in geography lessons. It is too soon to judge the impact of this training but the unsatisfactory situation that existed previously is now being actively and systematically tackled.
- The subject leader is knowledgeable, enthusiastic, keen on field work and has a clear understanding of what is needed to ensure progression in the geographical learning.
- She has introduced a range of effective strategies to monitor curriculum coverage and this is leading to action planning to tackle the longstanding issues, for example, regarding the teachers' use of too many worksheets.
- Plans are in place to establish a greater emphasis on outdoor learning and fieldwork, especially in relation to forest schools where a member of staff has already had training in preparation for this initiative.
- The school has appropriate resources including maps, atlases, photographs and books. However, it does not currently use the resources and support available from subject associations to keep teachers informed of new developments in the subject or enable them to take opportunities for further professional development.
- The governing body has a nominated link governor with the subject but no evidence exists of active monitoring or visits this academic year.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring better liaison with the on-site feeder infant school to establish what pupils have learned in Key Stage 1 in order that this information can be used to support further learning in the subject
- improving the depth of the curriculum by:
 - adopting a more robust enquiry approach to geographical topics
 - providing more first-hand outdoor learning experiences
- using the support and guidance provided by subject associations to further develop the subject and provide professional development opportunities for staff.
- reducing staff's reliance on worksheets and ensuring that the lessons provide enough challenge for the most able.

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

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Mo Roberts
Her Majesty's Inspector