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Mrs Forbes
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Dear Mrs Forbes

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 31 January 2008 to look at work in geography.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a focus on the school's response to 'Excellence and Enjoyment' and how this is impacting on provision in geography, particularly in terms of planning and progression.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of data, analysis of pupils' work and observation of displays around the school and three lessons.

The effectiveness of provision in geography is satisfactory overall with some aspects which are good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in geography are both satisfactory.

- The school has correctly identified that currently pupils are meeting national expectations.

- Pupils enter the school with a wide variability in their attainment. Most make satisfactory progress in their learning in geography.
- There remains some inconsistency across classes. Discussions with pupils and evidence from their work identified that little geography had been taught in Year 5 last year, for example. This has been recognised and is being rectified by the school.
- Pupils develop good geographical skills. These are being linked effectively to literacy and numeracy. This is now beginning to impact positively on standards in the subject.
- Due to this focus on skills, other aspects of geography such as interdependence, settlement and sustainability are less well developed.
- Pupils have a general awareness of place and can identify continents and broad geographical features. The international links that the school is fostering provide pupils with an appreciation of the world as a whole. Pupils are aware of a range of places, can identify and locate places but are less able to explain what that place is really like.
- Good use is being made of the subject to make pupils aware of the need to stay safe in a range of environments, both urban and rural.
- Pupils are making a real and positive contribution to the local community through some of the topics they study, such as the school grounds development or the wildlife garden. In planning these areas pupils are made aware of the need to cater for vulnerable groups in society, such as the blind or physically disabled. In planning access for such groups they make good use of maps and plans and develop a good awareness of scale.
- Behaviour in lessons is good. Girls attain better than the boys. They are more self reliant and are confident learners. Boys' attention and concentration spans are shorter and they are more easily distracted.

Quality of teaching and learning in geography

The quality of teaching is good but learning in geography varies across classes.

- Teachers have good generic teaching skills but some are insecure in how to adapt these to teach good geography.
- Where observed teaching was satisfactory, resources were either not appropriate or not used to best effecting order to engage pupils in learning geographically.
- When teachers' skills were well applied to learning about geography, there was a clear focus and pupils were also clear about expected outcomes. For example, children were well prepared for their residential visit to Richmond. Good teaching raised awareness of the locality the pupils were due to visit and they began to develop a real sense of place.
- Teachers are more secure in teaching geographical skills such as map work than learning about places and processes. In turn, effective use is

being made of using skills to assess pupils' progress in geography. Assessment of knowledge and understanding is less well developed.

- Pupils respond particularly well to practical tasks which involve doing, watching or working in the outdoor environment. Their enjoyment and application is noticeably better in these circumstances.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used regularly and often to good effect to enhance learning in geography. Good use is made in several classes of up-to-date and engaging resources such as Google Earth and Google Maps. The use of interactive maps and satellite and aerial imagery captures the imagination of the pupils. More effective use could be made in some classes of video and other visual materials such as photographs to bring learning to life.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good overall.

- The scheme of work ensures coverage and meets requirements. The school is aware of those areas and units of work which need development or where more up-to-date resources need to be provided and is working hard to improve these.
- There is a heavy emphasis on the local area and especially environmental issues. There is less evidence of how aspects of sustainability such as interdependence with the wider world are delivered.
- Contrasting localities such as Chembakoli are studied but not always in sufficient depth to ensure good progression in knowledge and understanding. The international links being developed provide a wonderful opportunity to personalise the study of contrasting localities and develop relevant and unique resources.
- The curriculum is enriched by events such as 'International Week', although the opportunities to learn geography are not always fully developed. The geography often provides the context for learning about the culture of a particular country. Such events provide children with an overview of the world but not necessarily a more in depth view about distant places.
- The subject profile is raised and enhanced by the numerous geographical displays around the school. Most classrooms and areas of the school have colourful and interesting displays which serve to remind pupils about the world around them.
- The transition module, which is delivered by the school and its receiving secondary, is a good way of encouraging links and making pupils comfortable with the change in setting.
- Good use is made of the immediate locality of the school and the outdoor environment to engage pupils and enhance learning in geography. Pupils particularly enjoy the opportunities this offers to make decisions about the local environment and how they can improve it. The residential visit to Richmond also supports learning in

geography but could be developed further to add increased depth to pupils' understanding of contrasting places and environments. Currently, the potential for using this visit to learn geography is not fully exploited.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- Geography is seen as being a relevant and important subject in the school which can add substantially to pupils learning.
- There is an established programme of monitoring and observation across all foundation subjects, including geography. This is beginning to provide the co-ordinator with a clearer picture of provision.
- The school has identified strengths and weaknesses in the subject and is already working on improvements, for example the Year 5 curriculum.
- Effective use has been made of the subject-specific support provided by the Local Authority. Time has also been made available to disseminate information and some elements of effective practice through in-house meetings during the year. However, not all teachers are secure in the teaching of geography.
- Limited use has been made of the resources and support provided through the subject associations or the training provided through the Action Plan for geography.
- The school is well resourced in terms of geography and money has generally been well spent on acquiring good quality resources to support teaching in the subject.

Subject issue

The impact of curriculum planning on progression and the quality of provision in geography is satisfactory, with some aspects which are good.

- There is good coverage of the key content of the geography programmes of study. The school has personalised its schemes of work to make effective use of the immediate locality and the geography resources available.
- There is good progression in skills, especially mapping and fieldwork skills. However, more in-depth knowledge and understanding, especially of more distant localities is, as yet, less well developed.
- There remain some inconsistencies across classes with teachers sometimes missing, or not being fully aware of, opportunities to teach geography. This has, at times, hampered progress in the subject. On such occasions geography has provided a context for learning in other subjects. For example, pupils identified that when studying the unit on the Nile, the emphasis was clearly on the ancient Egyptians and opportunities to study life in Egypt today were not explored.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in geography is good.

- Teachers know their pupils well and offer individual support in lessons as required.
- In the lessons observed, good use was made to provide differentiated work for pupils. Scrutiny of books showed that this is mainly by outcome and less frequently by use of alternative resources.
- Boys achieve less well than girls. In lessons, teachers are fully aware of the need to focus on engaging the boys in order to reduce this underachievement gap.
- Effective use is made of teaching assistants to support specific pupils with needs in geography lessons as this is required.

Areas for improvement

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include the need to:

- provide focused subject-specific training for teachers to encourage them to better utilise their good generic teaching skills in order to make learning in geography better
- review the curriculum to ensure that pupils progressively build up their knowledge and understanding, particularly of distant localities, as well as they develop their geographical skills
- make use of the developing international links to encourage and support more in-depth learning about distant places
- make better use of the support provided by subject associations and the Action Plan for geography to continue to develop the subject and improve resources throughout the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for the next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector
Specialist Adviser for Geography