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Mrs Wilkinson
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Dear Mrs Wilkinson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 07 May 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 three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are both good.

- Pupils make good progress from their well below average attainment on entry to achieve broadly average standards by the end of Key Stage 2. Very few pupils reach a level above the national expectation.

- Pupils acquire a sound knowledge and understanding of the places and themes they have studied. They know where places are and what they are like. For example, Year 1 pupils locate places that 'Barnaby Bear' has visited and accurately describe features such as simple climate differences; Year 5 and 6 pupils accurately describe the characteristics of coastal environments and know some of the physical processes which affect them. Pupils use appropriate geographical vocabulary with a good degree of confidence.
- The skills of geographical enquiry are less well developed. This is because opportunities to carry out investigations are not provided consistently across the school.
- Pupils enjoy the work that they do in geography. They show in lessons and discussions that they are interested in finding out about other people and places. They appreciate the importance of looking after their environment.
- Pupils learn confidently. They collaborate well and readily share their knowledge and views. They are attentive and present their work carefully.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Lessons are planned and prepared thoroughly. Teachers successfully choose activities that interest and engage pupils.
- Lessons proceed at a good pace because teachers are enthusiastic and are keen that their pupils should make good progress.
- Teachers use effective methods to promote learning, such as encouraging pupils to work together, and to apply their literacy skills. As a result, pupils get lots of opportunities to talk about and reflect upon their work as lessons unfold. This helps bring about good overall progress.
- There is some unevenness in learning. This is because some activities are based on completing worksheets or on copying notes. These tasks hinder progress, particularly amongst the most able. Also, these kinds of tasks over-emphasise the acquisition of factual knowledge and provide pupils with little choice about how they do their work. This restricts opportunities for geographical enquiry and the development of independent learning.
- Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and make positive comments. Whilst encouraging, these comments are often too general to help pupils understand how to improve their work.
- Teachers formally assess pupils work at the end of topics. They carefully record the results in order to provide an overview of standards reached. However, there has been little moderation of these assessments to ensure that teachers have a common understanding.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- There is a good coverage of national requirements because the Key Stage 1 and 2 schemes of work have been carefully constructed.
- Teachers plan together effectively in combined year group teams to ensure that there are no overlaps in content and that pupils can build on their previous learning.
- There is a good emphasis on promoting the relevance of learning geography. For example, teachers are alert to opportunities to develop geographical ideas and skills by studying weather events such as local flooding. An international link with a school in Sri Lanka encourages pupils' understanding of diversity and the issues surrounding aid.
- The school makes generally good use of the local area to study aspects of geography. A residential experience in a field studies centre is provided in Year 6, but as this takes place in the summer term its impact is reduced.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- The subject leader brings a good knowledge of national requirements to her role and provides positive leadership.
- There are appropriate systems of review which enable the subject leader to check the quality of provision. Consequently, there is an accurate understanding of what needs to be done to further improve. For example, the scrutiny of pupils' work has helped the subject leader advise other staff about how to refine provision in their classes.

Subject issue

The impact of curriculum planning on progression and the quality of provision in geography is satisfactory with emerging good features.

- The school has introduced a new programme based on common themes to link subjects together in Key Stage 1. This has yet to be formally evaluated, but is providing opportunities to teachers to extend and reinforce pupils' learning by, for example, connecting topics in science and geography.
- The Key Stage 2 scheme is based on individual subjects. Each geography unit is carefully planned but links with other subjects aimed at strengthening learning are still underdeveloped. There are a few good examples, such as the letters expressing concerns about pollution written in English lessons. However, opportunities such as this are not systematically provided.

- The introduction of new computer technology into all classrooms is being successfully used to make learning easier. However, pupils do not make systematic use of information communication technology to investigate topics or to present their work.
- Teachers make generally good links with pupils' literacy needs. These links are strong in the application of speaking and listening skills and in the acquisition of technical vocabulary.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in geography is good.

- Teachers know their pupils well and are quick to spot when they need extra support.
- Teaching assistants are used effectively to provide additional help for pupils with learning difficulties.
- Teachers plan activities and use methods which encourage all pupils to play a full part in lessons. They provide resources which engage and interest pupils.

Areas for improvement

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

- ensure that pupils are consistently challenged by the work they do, for example, to apply their geographical enquiry skills to further raise standards
- take forward plans to strengthen assessment by standardising teachers' judgements and by improving the guidance to pupils about how to improve their work
- develop the links being made between geography and other subjects to further strengthen the quality of provision and progression.

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

Ralph Higgs
Additional inspector