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Mr Hemington  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Hemington

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 24 June 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 a geography assembly and three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good and standards are satisfactory.

- Pupils enter the school with knowledge and skills that are well below the level expected for their age. They make good progress and the majority reach broadly average standards by the end of Key Stage 2.

- Pupils have a generally sound factual knowledge of the places and processes they study. However, they are insecure when making connections between the physical and human features of places and explaining changes.
- Pupils acquire a range of geographical skills to investigate places and processes. For example, Year 6 pupils have used a number of sources of evidence in their local study of the River Mersey and the Bridgewater canal. However, geographical enquiry does not play a consistent part in pupils' learning and they lack independence in applying their skills.
- In lessons and discussions, pupils show that they enjoy the work they do in geography. They are interested in finding out about other places and the lives that different people lead.
- Pupils recognise the importance of looking after their environment through schemes such as recycling waste. They are aware of a number of global concerns such as climate change and Fair Trade. They appreciate the potential impact of the decisions that they take upon the lives of others.

### Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teaching is enthusiastic and accurate. Lessons are planned and prepared thoroughly.
- Activities are chosen carefully to involve and interest all pupils. For example, pupils in an upper Key Stage 2 class enjoyed making large displays representing their observations of the local landscape.
- Lessons proceed at a good pace. No time is wasted as relationships are good and pupils are keen to learn.
- Teachers use questioning strategies which encourage all pupils to play a full part in lessons.
- Good use is made of information communication technology (ICT) to provide information and to develop skills. Computer images of photographs taken on two recent visits were used effectively in a lower Key Stage 2 class to encourage pupils to make accurate comparisons.
- Teachers know their pupils well and are quick to give them support if they have a difficulty.
- Teaching assistants are used effectively to provide additional help for pupils with learning difficulties.
- Teachers make positive comments when they mark pupils' work. However, they often only offer general praise which does not help pupils know what to do next to improve their work.
- Assessments of pupils' work are done infrequently and do not provide sufficient coverage of progress across all elements of geography.
- The school recognises that the current system of assessment does not help teachers enough to moderate their judgements or to adjust their future planning.

## Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- There is a good coverage of National Curriculum requirements as aspects of geography are clearly identified in most of the thematic topics that pupils learn.
- There is a strong focus on the acquisition of basic skills which promotes pupils' progress well.
- Each thematic topic is planned in detail and takes account of the mixed ages in each class. A clear cycle of topics has been established which avoids overlaps in provision.
- Teachers are encouraged to make learning enjoyable by promoting creative links between geography and other subjects such as art and drama. Consequently, there is a good variety of work undertaken across the school.
- Not enough use is made of geographical enquiry outside of the classroom. Limited use of the locality is made in Key Stage 1. Although there is a residential experience in a field studies centre provided in Year 6 this focuses on adventurous activities.

## Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- You have provided very clear direction to curriculum development and self-evaluation in this small school.
- In this context, the relatively new subject leader has carried out expected responsibilities well.
- Teachers are provided with good support and advice about the use of resources and national requirements.
- A detailed review of provision has been carried out which clearly identifies areas for improvement. An appropriate action plan has been established.

## Subject issue

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

- A new thematic curriculum which is based on linking subjects together into areas of learning has been established.
- Provision in geography has benefited from this as pupils are strongly motivated to learn. This has promoted good progress from pupils' low starting points on entry to the school.

- Pupils have opportunity to study aspects of geography in depth. There is a good emphasis on using literacy and ICT to extend skills and knowledge.
- Several imaginative initiatives have been introduced. For example, Year 5 and 6 pupils have been working on an additional extended study linking history, art, drama and geography together. This has strongly captured the interest of pupils who are keen to complete preparations for their drama about the 'Weaver's Tale'.
- A nurture group which has been established in Years 3 and 4 has extended opportunities for low attaining pupils to learn through practical, creative experiences and at a pace which motivates them. This nurture provision is making a significant contribution to the inclusion of pupils with specific learning needs.
- A review by the subject leader has ensured that progression is generally good although it has revealed that some aspects of physical geography have inconsistent coverage in Key Stage 2.

#### Areas for improvement

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

- further strengthen progression across all aspects of geography so that pupils are helped to reach higher standards
- improve assessment arrangements to ensure that pupils' progress is rigorously monitored and that they are provided with good feedback about how to improve their work
- increase opportunities for pupils to take part in geographical enquiry outside of the classroom.

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