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Mr Billings
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Billings

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 22 January 2009 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 how effectively geography teaching and the curriculum promotes community cohesion.

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 in parts of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory with some emerging strengths.

Achievement and standards

Both achievement and standards are satisfactory overall.

- Children start school with skills and experiences that are below expected levels. In the Foundation Stage, children have an appropriate play based curriculum which develops their knowledge and understanding of the world well. Children are able to describe and discuss how they travel to school, draw a picture, make a graph and identify which is the most

frequent value. Geography skills are suitably developed and supported by a range of appropriate indoor and outdoor activities.

- In Years 1 and 2, pupils make good progress to achieve satisfactory standards by the end of Key Stage 1. They are able to design simple maps and know that they can get to different places in a variety of ways. They are able to identify and describe what a place is like following their visit to Colchester. They know that the world extends beyond their locality following visits to Harwich and Mistley Park.
- This work is soundly built on in Years 3. Through the study of Chembakolli and the increased development of mapwork skills, pupils increase their knowledge of settlements and locations. They are able to describe weather in different localities and explain similarities and differences.
- Standards by the end of Year 6 are broadly average. Pupils from Year 4 onwards develop their enquiry skills satisfactorily and have a sound knowledge and understanding of their locality. However, their geographical skills and knowledge and understanding of environmental change and sustainable development are not developed sufficiently.
- Pupils are keen and interested in their work. Their behaviour is good and they respond well to clear classroom expectations. Relationships between adults and pupils are good.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching is satisfactory with some good features.

- Good teaching was seen in those lessons observed during this visit. Work was well planned and carefully built on previous learning. Teachers made learning objectives clear to pupils so that they had a good understanding of what the purpose of the lesson was and what they should achieve by its conclusion.
- Pupils were provided with good opportunities to work in a variety of different ways, either individually, in pairs or small groups. A range of activities and resources were used which added interest to the lessons. Questions were widely distributed which helped pupils develop their speaking and listening skills.
- Scrutiny of books and displays, in addition to discussion with pupils, shows a more varied picture. In Years 1 to 3, there is a good range of work which demonstrates good coverage and understanding of the themes. However, from Year 4 onwards, geography is not taught regularly enough or in sufficient depth. Skills are not developed adequately and pupils' thinking is not challenged well enough to build on the firm foundation provided in earlier years. Consequently, this does not allow pupils to develop or extend their skills, knowledge and understanding beyond a satisfactory level.
- An assessment recording procedure has been introduced very recently. Teachers are beginning to make assessments at the end of each unit against key skills. They are just getting to grips with the process and

recognise some modifications and adjustments are required. For example, there is no key to identify what the colour coding means.

- Pupils do not know how well they are doing in geography. Although work is marked regularly, little guidance is provided on key pieces of work to help pupils know what they need to do to improve.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Teachers have revised the geography schemes of work which have been implemented from September 2008.
- Although the geography curriculum is appropriate in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, there are some weaknesses in Key Stage 2. For example, the two year cycle is imbalanced in Years 3 and 4 with little geography planned in year 'B'. In addition, opportunities to teach geography are not always included in some themes. For example, there appears to be no explicit geography links in themes such as Victorian Colchester or Egypt.
- Some units, such as the Year 5 and 6 theme of how to improve traffic in Colchester do not sufficiently build on or extend work completed lower down the school. Mapwork and environmental and sustainable geography skills are not taught in sufficient depth.
- Good cross-curricular links have been established with literacy, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). For example, Year 3 pupils were able to describe climatic conditions of different countries using appropriate geographical vocabulary word processed on post cards and sent to each other.
- Fieldwork experiences around the school, Colchester, Harwich and Walton on the Naze are highly valued and contribute positively to the subject and pupils' learning.
- Pupils are beginning to increase their knowledge of global issues such as recycling and climate change as a result of their Eco-School's work.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are satisfactory.

- Improvement of the subject has not been a priority in recent years because the focus has been on other whole school priorities. The established subject leader is now beginning to develop her role but impact is at an early stage.
- The subject leader has co-ordinated a number of recent developments. She has overseen the revision of the schemes of work, and associated long and medium term plans.
- Systematic monitoring and evaluation of geography is also now been undertaken. Consequently, the subject leader is increasing her

understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the subject and an appropriate plan of action has been constructed for further improvement.

- The governing body is increasing its knowledge and understanding of geography by receiving annual reports from the subject leader.
- The subject leader has attended recent professional development to inform herself about current issues in geography.

Subject issue

The effectiveness of geography teaching and the curriculum in promoting community cohesion is satisfactory.

- The school supports community cohesion and understands the importance of delivering it through the geography curriculum. School leaders are developing a whole school community cohesion policy but this is not yet complete. Consequently, community cohesion is not yet identified within geography policy, strategic planning or within the geography schemes of work.
- A good range of opportunities are provided throughout the school to learn about their locality. Pupils have a very good understanding of issues affecting the St John's area of Colchester and the town itself. However, their understanding of European and global issues is less well developed.
- Parents and carers are increasing their understanding of the work their children are doing through regular homework activities and information in the school's newsletters. This informs them about the range activities being undertaken in the school and how they might support their children.
- Relationships are good. Positive interactions between all learners and staff are successfully encouraged.

Areas for improvement

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

- increase coverage, challenge and rates of progress in geography from Year 4 onwards
- at the end of this cycle, evaluate and adjust the geography schemes of work in the light of experience to ensure appropriate breadth and coverage
- evaluate and, where appropriate, revise the recently introduced assessment system
- complete and implement to community cohesion policy.

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

Paul Weston
Her Majesty's Inspector