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Mrs Holden
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Dear Mrs Holden

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography 2009/10

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 15 June 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 of four part lessons. I also met the South Devon estuaries officer with regard to your fieldwork programme.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good and standards are satisfactory overall

- From entry to the school, most pupils make good progress overall, especially in their development of geographical skills. By the end of both Key Stage 1 and 2 most reach national standards with a few exceeding them.

- Pupils with learning difficulties often make good progress because good provision is made by teachers to enable them to access the geography curriculum with appropriate support.
- Geographical skills are particularly well developed due to the good range of practical experiences provided. From an early age pupils are used to using role play and participating in field visits which enable them to think about what other places are like.
- There are excellent opportunities for pupils to develop fieldwork skills, such as data collection related to the flow of a river at different stages. They also record observations well through field sketching and/or photography.
- Pupils can recall a good range of geographical facts and use geographical vocabulary with precision. Those learning about farming understood for example, the concept of 'run off' and river pollution. While younger ones learned to read and say the word sustainable and began to really think about the concept of 'keeping things nice for others in the future'.
- The progression in pupils' skills is evident in the well presented wall displays throughout the school and in their topic books. Younger pupils benefit greatly from the imaginative work such as their sand play related to the problem 'where would it be safe on a beach to hide your treasure?'
- Pupils are very responsive in class and keen to answer questions. Relationships with teachers and their peers are very positive despite the mixed age classes with wide ability spreads. Pupils with learning difficulties also enjoy their practical learning and produced good work on the rainforest in Guatemala.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching and learning is good

- Work is well planned with a wide variety of activities and resources used. These are selected to extend pupils' thinking and to add interest to the lessons. Stories are well used to help younger pupils understand difficult concepts. They especially enjoyed one about a rainforest tree frog.
- Lessons are well paced with the needs of the different ages and abilities fully considered. Pupils respond positively to working in imaginative ways. In all lessons, good opportunities are provided to develop speaking and listening, reading and writing skills. This includes a specialist programme for pupils with special needs.
- Through regular residential experiences from Year 2 onwards, pupils enjoy the opportunity to experiment and investigate the environment in less familiar areas such as a river estuary. These experiences lead to good work from all pupils no matter what their ability.
- Good use is made by pupils of information and communication technology (ICT), including the use of digital cameras and laptop computers. They have also benefited from access to very recent research relating to the issues in rice farming and pricing around the globe.

- They have good access to digital cameras, with even very young pupils confident to record their seaside work by this means. They use laptop computers expertly. The school has a wireless connection which greatly assists their access to recent and relevant geographical materials.
- Assessment and moderation of pupils' work is at the end of units. This is detailed and carefully matched against the national levels. The school however, retains no portfolio of its geographical work.
- Pupils know how well they are doing and can explain how they would improve their work. Families are well informed about the pupils' work in the subject through newsletter items, pupil conferences and pupils' reports.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The school curriculum is carefully devised to meet the needs of mixed age classes and avoid repetition of topics. The exciting themes have geography as the main subject for a third of the time. When geography is the subsidiary subject it is still carefully taught and the key skills are appropriately emphasised.
- The school uses cross-curricular approaches successfully to maximise the pupils' understanding of maps and global imaging systems.
- There are also good opportunities to study topical issues such as the destruction of the rainforests and global warming.
- Pupils understand the global nature of the world and far from being isolated they are now preparing to link up, through video conferencing, with pupils in other schools both in the United Kingdom and then in due course with those overseas.
- There are good opportunities for pupils to use the local area to develop a good understanding of sustainable development related to farming and land use.
- The European dimension is underdeveloped within topics although the modern foreign language programme is beginning to provide more opportunities to develop this aspect.

Leadership and management of geography

The leadership and management of geography are good

- You are very interested in the topic and teach some of the lessons yourself. You ensure that the assessment is detailed and accurate and that the progress pupils make in their skills builds well over time. You agree that progression in map skills could be more clearly specified in the school's documentation.
- Curriculum coverage is monitored and adjustments made to keep it topical and interesting and to build on pupils' interests.

- Resources are good for the teaching of geographical skills. ICT software provision is carefully chosen to maximise opportunities; this includes good programmes to support those who find learning more difficult.
- The school uses the latest information from Teachernet and staff have access to relevant training through, for example, good practical opportunities to work alongside a field officer for the local estuary.

Subject issue

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

- The school has successfully integrated general ideas from the community cohesion advice into the geography curriculum but understands that this needs further development and detail.
- There is a wide range of community activity within this village school and this includes harvest time links to a school in Ghana. Pupils know that the children there are like themselves; even though their way of life and circumstances are different.
- The school policy identifies where geography assists pupils' understanding of equity and fairness in the global context; through studying issues such as the varying impact of the changing price of rice.
- Pupils' knowledge of Europe is less strong than their general global knowledge. However, older ones were aware elections to the European parliament had recently taken place.
- In Key Stage 1, the pupils looked at ceremonies in England and India especially those related to weddings. This has led to a good learning about Indian village life compared to English village life. This forms a strong foundation for Key Stage 2 more detailed work on an Indian Village.
- A good range of activities are provided throughout the school to learn about local and global issues and to actively debate them and to form opinions as future citizens. The thinking skills programme greatly assists with the level of debate.
- Relationships are good with very positive interactions between all learners and staff.

Areas for improvement

Areas for improvement that we discussed include the need to:

- ensure that the skills expected in each year for understanding maps are recorded on the fieldwork skills ladder that is already in place
- review the geography policy and make the maximum use of the subject to enhance pupils' understanding of Europe and all aspects of community cohesion
- check that that in the new enhanced curriculum the knowledge and understanding of places and geographical processes receive an equal amount of time to skills based work.

Yours sincerely

Mo Roberts
Her Majesty's Inspector