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Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Morgans-Slader

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 9 December 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 focused on how effectively geography teaching and the curriculum promote 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of data and pupils' work; and the observation of one lesson.

The overall effectiveness of geography is inadequate because the curriculum does not meet requirements. Weaknesses in the curriculum impact on other areas of geography provision.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is inadequate.

- Pupils receive a very disjointed experience of geography as deficiencies in the curriculum mean that they are unable to achieve across all aspects of geographical knowledge, skills and understanding. As a result, they make only limited progress in their understanding of the subject and the complexities of the world around them.

- In the Nursery and Reception classes, regular exposure to the outdoor environment, through walks and visits in the immediate locality of the school, raises pupils' awareness of the place they live in and its unique characteristics.
- At Key Stage 1, pupils have some knowledge of the distribution and location of places but a very limited understanding of what these places are like.
- At Key Stage 2, pupils are aware of certain geographically related issues such as global warming or the moral implications of the exploitation of child labour. These issues are sometimes explored in science lessons or through developing writing in literacy. However, geographical learning is often peripheral and lacks a cohesive structure.
- Pupils also lack a more in-depth understanding of places. Their knowledge is often limited to cultural rather than geographical experiences.
- When geography is taught, there is often a focus on skills rather than knowledge and understanding of places.
- Relationships and attitudes in the observed lesson were good. Pupils were attentive, responsive and worked well collaboratively.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching is inadequate.

- Only one lesson was observed, the geography component of which was very limited. Examination of planning, discussions with pupils and scrutiny of their work reveal weak outcomes in terms of geographical learning. Teachers have good generic teaching skills but their ability to translate these into real and relevant geographical experiences for the pupils is more limited.
- There is limited evidence of geographical work in pupils' books. Often this is incomplete. There is also little evidence of the use and analysis of geographical data or of graphicacy skills being developed.
- Work is marked but assessment of outcomes is poor. Pupils' errors and misconceptions are rarely corrected.
- Although some topical issues are explored in some lessons, these are not covered in sufficient detail for pupils to make sufficient progress in their learning.
- Pupils remain unclear about how they are progressing in geography or how they can improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is inadequate.

- Currently, the programme of learning does not meet statutory requirements. There is no cohesive structure to the geography curriculum

which is taught through selected units of the International Primary Curriculum (IPC).

- The school has recognised weaknesses in the structure and the limitations on progression these impose on pupils' learning. A re-evaluation of what is being taught is underway but as yet there has been no impact of proposed changes.
- Currently, there are insufficient opportunities to study places in depth or physical processes, such as rivers or coasts. Opportunities for quality fieldwork are limited or not fully explored.
- Units of the IPC are used as a basis for the learning programme. However, opportunities to teach geography in some of the units selected may be limited and these are often focused primarily on basic skills. Not all the work is relevant to pupils. For example, they may be able to differentiate between Mercator and Peters projections but are not able to use real maps effectively.
- Apart from the Nursery and Reception classes, where some effective use is made of the outdoor environment, there is little evidence of the effective use of fieldwork to enhance geographical learning. External visits often have a greater focus on other areas of the curriculum. Fieldwork is not planned for well.
- Geography frequently provides a context for learning in other subjects. For example, a map may be used to locate a story in English or an incident in history but the geography of places is rarely explored.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is inadequate.

- The subject leadership has reviewed the curriculum recently and has identified shortcomings, especially in the lack of the progressive development of knowledge skills and understanding in geography.
- The monitoring of outcomes for pupils is insufficient to enable leadership to tackle shortcomings in the quality of geographical learning in the classroom.
- The lack of subject-specific staff development or updating has meant that teachers are poorly prepared to teach geography.
- Little use has been made of the help, support or resources provided by the subject associations to improve the quality of provision in geography.

Subject issue

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

- The lack of a cohesive programme for learning in geography means that opportunities to promote community cohesion are incidental rather than planned.

- The focus on the cultural aspects of places may interest pupils but tends to over-emphasise differences and the exotic rather than drawing attention to similarities and reality.
- There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to study places in greater depth to enable them to make informed comparisons.
- Links with schools abroad offer opportunities for pupils to better understand the world around them; however, these links are not used in geography to enhance learning about different places.
- Issues such as globalisation, human rights and sustainability are sometimes explored but not often as part of a cohesive framework of learning in geography.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- devising a curriculum framework which will allow teachers to deliver statutory geography requirements
- improving teachers' expertise to teach geographically through using the resources and support provided by the subject associations
- raising standards in geography by ensuring that pupils' geographical experiences build progressively on their earlier learning
- ensuring that there is a balance between teaching geographical knowledge and understanding as well as skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector