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Mrs J Wallace  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Wallace

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 17 November 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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half term.

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

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is good.

- Children enter the Reception class with levels of knowledge and understanding of the world above that found typically for four-year-olds.
- Pupils make good progress as they move through the school to reach standards that are well above national expectations in geography.
- As pupils move into Key Stage 2, they develop high-level enquiry skills and can communicate their understanding well through presentations to their

peers. Philosophical questioning is used effectively to consider issues surrounding global inequality.

- Pupils have a good understanding of their own locality and can compare this confidently with a contrasting place through the use of video conferencing and aerial photographs from the internet. They demonstrate a good understanding of different places around the world and know what it is like to live in particular places such as Meghalaya in India, where the Bethesda School, with which pupils have a good link, is situated.
- Pupils behave well and this makes a significant contribution to their good rates of learning and progress. Through discussion and collaboration, they can sustain independent work on geographical projects and tasks set by teachers. They demonstrate a good understanding of environmental issues and can discuss why this is important.

### Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching is good.

- Teachers have appropriate geographical knowledge and have high expectations for pupils' progress and conduct in all lessons.
- Pupils enjoy the various field trips and working in the school grounds to investigate and explore geographical features, processes and ideas.
- Younger children enjoy exploring their immediate surroundings in a well-developed and beautiful outdoor area that is designed for pupils to use all their senses.
- Good links are made with literacy to raise standards. For example, in a Year 5/6 class, pupils effectively discussed the advantages and disadvantages of living in rural and urban localities. They researched their ideas on the internet systematically and used high-level speaking and listening skills to express their views.
- Teachers are developing a good, enquiry-based approach to the teaching of geography through questioning to develop deeper learning.
- The school has a range of appropriate geographical resources and good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching and learning.
- Assessment information is used well to plan for the range of pupils' needs.
- All work is marked regularly with useful comments to provide pupils with guidance on how to improve. Pupils appreciate this and older pupils have a good understanding of their levels.
- Support staff work effectively in lessons to ensure pupils make good progress in geography.

### Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The school has worked effectively to develop the curriculum. Good curriculum planning meets statutory requirements and effective links have been made between subjects, including geography, to provide relevant contexts and raise levels of interest for pupils.
- Geographical skills are developed logically and in sequence to provide a structure for pupils to gain knowledge and develop geographical understanding well. Coordinators recognise the need to further improve the development of fieldwork skills through a more systematic and clearly planned approach.
- The 'Philosophy for Children' programme is well established and provides a sophisticated and effective approach to develop deeper learning through the exploration of topical issues of interest to the pupils.
- The school is taking part in an innovative curriculum partnership project with the City Learning Centre in Oldham to develop the use of ICT in geography. Pupils successfully use hand-held devices loaded with applications to explore the locations of cities and research climate and other geographical features in a structured programme of learning. Consequently, pupils are highly motivated to improve their knowledge and understanding of different places.

#### Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- Coordinators rigorously check pupils' workbooks and teachers' planning, and analyse data to inform their action plans. They know the main strengths and weaknesses in the subject. Opportunities to monitor the teaching of geography in lessons are presently limited to the headteacher. The school recognises that this is an area which requires further development.
- Governors take an active role in the monitoring of the curriculum and challenge and support the school to improve. The geography coordinators regularly present their findings at meetings to keep them informed.
- Geography coordinators demonstrate a reflective approach in their practice and conduct regular audits to inform good-quality future plans.
- The subject associations' websites are used to identify interesting activities which can be used in the classroom, but the support they are able to provide is not used to develop other teachers' ability to teach geography. The capacity to improve, however, is good.
- Procedures for the assessment of pupils in geography are outstanding. Pupils are assessed regularly and this informs target-setting and teachers' planning to maintain at least good levels of progress throughout the school. Analysis of data is thorough and underachievement is tackled effectively.

## Subject issue

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

- Thorough and detailed strategic planning ensures community cohesion is taught effectively to all groups of pupils through the geography curriculum. Pupils demonstrate good understanding of their school and local communities and can demonstrate how they make an important contribution to it, for example, through the development of their good travel plan.
- Topical issues surrounding the environment or natural disasters are studied, so pupils develop a good empathic understanding of people's lives in different societies. For example, pupils were well aware of the devastation to communities in El Salvador following the recent mudslides, due to a strong link with people there and the school's effective use of media to raise their awareness.
- Pupils are aware of the diversity of people in different countries. They undertake independent research and respond positively to units of work. They demonstrate understanding and respect for all aspects of diversity.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- further developing pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills through more regular fieldwork
- providing geography coordinators with opportunities to monitor lessons directly, to inform action-planning
- supplement continuous professional development of all staff through the support and resources available from the subject associations.

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

Yours sincerely

Liam Trippier  
Her Majesty's Inspector