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Mr M Prescott
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Prescott

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 30 June 2010 to look at work in geography.

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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; observation of parts of five lessons; and a learning walk through the school.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is good.

- Pupils make good progress from starting points that are below those found typically. By the time pupils leave Year 6, they achieve broadly average standards. However, fewer than expected numbers of pupils reach the higher levels of attainment.
- Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the localities studied, particularly those in other continents, as they have developed a good sense of what it is like to live there through their international studies.
- Pupils use information and communication technology well to research themes. They work effectively and with independence when finding out about different countries and the issues facing people there.

- Pupils' behaviour in lessons is often outstanding. This makes a strong contribution to the quality of their learning. They participate fully and show high levels of enthusiasm.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching in geography is good with some outstanding features.

- Teachers plan lessons effectively, based upon assessment information and adapted curriculum plans, to meet most pupils' needs well. However, not all pupils that are capable of higher levels are challenged enough.
- Teaching assistants support different groups of pupils sensitively to ensure all participate fully. They also guide those with special educational needs and/or disabilities effectively.
- High-quality oral feedback to pupils helps them to develop more sophisticated thinking. For example, younger pupils classified different buildings in a seaside town, viewed on an interactive whiteboard, and located these accurately on a map. The teacher clarified their responses expertly throughout the lesson and provided several good opportunities for them to reflect and develop their geographical understanding.
- Some examples of teachers' marking in pupils' workbooks provide strong guidance on how they can improve their work. However, this is not consistent throughout the school.
- Assessment for learning strategies are used particularly well to identify pupils' misconceptions. Teachers have good subject knowledge which enables them to tackle these confidently.
- Pupils enjoy their geography lessons, particularly when teachers use good-quality resources to make lessons memorable.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is good.

- The curriculum meets statutory requirements. It uses a combination of structured units, strong international studies, fieldwork and cross-curricular themes effectively to interest pupils and develop their skills, knowledge and understanding in a coherent and logical sequence.
- The school has reviewed its curriculum and recognises that some older units of work are less relevant to pupils' current lives. They have suitable plans in place to tackle this issue.
- The Eco Council and gardening club provide good opportunities for pupils to contribute positively to their school and local environment. Pupils are well aware of the need to reduce their carbon footprint through recycling and reducing energy use.
- High-quality geography displays contribute well to the school's attractive and effective learning environment.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- The geography coordinator conducts a wide range of monitoring activities to inform future action plans with appropriate priorities. Leaders know the strengths and areas for development. However, some assessment information is not quantified and summarised sufficiently to show patterns and trends over time or to precisely identify areas for future development.
- Leaders have developed a strong system of accountability to ensure geography is promoted effectively in the school. Staff are well trained and pupils make good progress.
- The coordinator attends the local geography cluster group and informs staff of latest developments. The local authority provides good support for developing geography in the school. The school also uses the support of the professional associations to provide guidance for the coordinator.
- Teachers deliver the curriculum well and they are supported effectively by the coordinator and senior leaders. A useful portfolio of work has been developed to inform teachers of progression in geography throughout the school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising attainment further by:
 - developing a consistent approach to marking in geography
 - planning clearly differentiated tasks in lessons to enable more pupils to reach higher levels
- improving the use of assessment data to inform precise actions in future subject plans.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop geography in the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Liam Trippier
Her Majesty's Inspector