

9 November 2011

Mrs F Allen  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Allen

### **Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: geography**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 1 November 2011, accompanied by Jane Millward HMI, 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; and observation of six lessons, including a 'welly' walk, as well as a learning walk around the school.

The overall effectiveness of geography is outstanding.

### **Achievement in geography**

Achievement in geography is outstanding.

- Pupils receive a very good grounding in geography as they move through the school so that most make very good and consistent progress.
- In Reception and Key Stage 1, pupils become familiar with the diversity in the locality. They develop good observational skills through frequent exposure to the outdoor environment. Regular experiences such as 'welly walks' and visits around the local area support this very well.
- Pupils develop a very good awareness of a wide range of contrasting places through very good use of enrichment days, links with partner schools and through cross-curricular approaches, for which geography frequently provides a rich context. Place knowledge is good and pupils are able to locate many places as far apart as Thailand or Canada, with a high degree of accuracy.
- The very good progress pupils make in Key Stage 2 is strongly linked to a very effective and continually evolving curriculum which enables them to

develop a very good knowledge and understanding of places as well as consolidate skills, including mapping skills.

- The very strong emphasis on geographical vocabulary in lessons means that this aspect is especially well developed with pupils able to explain erosion and deposition in the context of rivers and coasts as well as use words such as meander, stack and stump with clear understanding.
- Pupils develop generally good fieldwork skills, especially observation skills. However, currently, the collection of primary data is more limited to the use of questionnaires rather than a wider range of data collection strategies.
- The use of enquiry approaches throughout Key Stage 2 ensures that by the time pupils complete Year 6 they are able to think geographically. They are able to make clear connections and show very good ability to make a judgement and then back it up with a reasoned explanation or argument.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They are equally engaged whether working collaboratively or independently. Relationships are very positive and mutually supportive.

### **Quality of teaching in geography**

The quality of teaching in geography is outstanding.

- All lessons observed were of high quality. Teachers have very good generic skills. The high-quality resources and clear planning guidance ensures that they are able to confidently translate their generic expertise into teaching geographically.
- Teachers exhibit good geographical knowledge and are well supported by the clear subject-specific guidance provided by the seven graduate geographers on the staff.
- Teachers have high expectations and use a wide range of appropriate, creative and, at times, innovative strategies to engage pupils and access their learning. For example, pupils in Year 1 were sitting open mouthed and in awe when the teacher opened a box delivered by an alien spaceship. They listened attentively to an animated request from their alien visitor to identify a safe landing point. Zooming in from space, using Google Earth, to hover above the school provided an aerial view which brought the task to life and enabled the pupils to begin to make basic observations about the surrounding landscape to help their unusual visitor.
- The use of geographical enquiry, observed in Years 3 and 6, enabled pupils to discuss and put forward their ideas regarding the siting of a camp site (Year 3) or a new facility in Corsham (year 6). Not only is there a strong focus on developing speaking and listening skills but there is also an emphasis on clear, well-supported geographical debate throughout the school, which is especially well embedded in Key Stage 2.
- Questioning involved pupils interacting with their teacher and each other. The emphasis was on thinking geographically. The clarity of instruction meant that pupils were left in no doubt that bland statements such as, 'I would like a cinema to be built because I enjoy going to the cinema' were unacceptable. There was a clear expectation that geographical reasons

were to be given backed by a clear understanding of the geography of the locality.

- Excellent and frequent use is made of information and communication technology to both visually engage pupils and to provide a resource which pupils can interrogate and use to assess their understanding. This includes frequent use of satellite imagery, aerial photographs as well as animations and video clips.
- The emphasis on topical issues ensures that pupils are immersed in geography and are kept up to date with many world and topical events. For example, they identified that The Queen was touring Australia and that there was disastrous flooding in Thailand. In addition, they were able to locate these places accurately.
- Very effective management skills supported learning well and reflected the high-quality teaching skills. For example, pupils in a Year 3 classroom, on command and with minimum fuss and noise, moved desks and chairs to create a circular space around an imaginary campfire. This enlivened their debate as to whether a campsite would be beneficial to the economy of Corsham and what impact it might have on the quality of life of the residents.
- Pupils' work is marked very effectively and usually with developmental points identified. This was especially well done at Key Stage 2 with most pupils clear about what they needed to do to improve and they were able to identify their next steps in learning.
- A portfolio of moderated work provides useful guidance for teachers, especially non-specialists, to be able to assess pupils' progress with confidence. Assessment is well established and documented and supports teachers' day-to-day planning well.

### **Quality of the curriculum in geography**

The quality of the curriculum in geography is outstanding.

- There is a very good balance between a study of a wide range of places, enhancement through themed days and weeks and the use of geography to provide a strong cross-curricular link. The curriculum is vibrant and evolving to meet pupils' specific needs or to reflect topical events.
- The school has well-established links with schools in contrasting localities, nearby in Bristol and further afield in Spain and India. A new link is developing with the Gambia. These links provide a wealth of enrichment experiences for the pupils. Currently, these are mainly additional to the curriculum rather than fully embedded in the taught curriculum.
- The curriculum is very well matched to pupils needs, including those in the Brook Centre (specialist speech and language unit). Work is frequently differentiated and personalised for those pupils with more complex needs.
- All pupils have good opportunities to experience fieldwork and outdoor learning on a regular basis. Effective use is made of the local environment and pupils develop very good observational skills. The collection of a wider range of data, first hand, is more limited.

- The blend of discrete geography, enriched by a plethora of other experiences, provides a vibrant mix that supports geographical learning very well.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography**

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is outstanding.

- There is a clear and shared vision for the subject in the school. Effective collegiate planning underpins what is being delivered in the classroom. There is a constant focus on improvement.
- The subject has a high profile in the everyday life of the school. This is visible in the many colourful displays around the school which celebrate pupils' work and achievement in the subject.
- There is a cumulative legacy of constant improvement based on a very comprehensive and detailed analysis of strengths and the identification of areas which need further resourcing or development. Currently, the whole-school focus on the global dimension is embedding a real sense of place, and stressing the value of diversity, into the curriculum.
- Management of resources is sensible and focused. Planning is well used to identify where topics need further development or resourcing to ensure high-quality outcomes.
- Subject expertise within the teaching team is very good and the school is aware of the resources and support provided by the subject associations. There is a good sharing of effective practice and ideas.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- making sure that fieldwork is more focused on a wider range of data collection strategies to enable pupils to use this information to further improve their knowledge, understanding and skills
- ensuring that the well-developed links with contrasting schools, in this country and abroad, are used more effectively to embed geography learning into the discrete geography curriculum.

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

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

**Leszek Iwaskow**

**Her Majesty's Inspector**