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Mrs K Raven  
Headmistress  
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Dear Mrs Raven

### **Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: geography**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 20 and 21 January 2011 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 students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is outstanding.

### **Achievement in geography**

Achievement in geography is outstanding.

- Students make exceptional progress because of consistently high-quality teaching, ambitious target-setting, rigorous assessment and very high expectations of behaviour. Consequently, most students aspire to succeed and take responsibility for their own achievement by working hard and taking pride in their work.
- When students start in Year 7, they generally have rather superficial subject knowledge. They quickly broaden their locational knowledge and geographical vocabulary and develop a sound understanding of human and physical processes across a wide range of scales and contexts.

- Standards by the end of Key Stage 3 are above average. Examination results at GCSE, AS and A level are significantly above those found nationally.
- The quality of learning in lessons is consistently good or better. Students of all abilities make good progress in their learning because work is suitably challenging for different groups.
- Students show impressive independence and often demonstrate creativity in their work. They reflect carefully and take the initiative in working collaboratively. Students in Year 10, for example, have prepared and delivered a unit of work for Year 4 pupils in a local primary school.
- Older students have a very good geographical understanding and develop the skills and confidence to evaluate complex issues. Year 10 students, for example, analysed a wealth of information to weigh up the impact of counter-urbanisation on London's rural fringe. They quickly developed a grasp of interconnections between human and physical environments and the resulting geographical patterns.
- Fieldwork and other geographical skills, such as locational decision making, are highly developed. Students have a real interest and curiosity in their wider world. Their personal development is a notable strength. Their opinions are well considered and well rooted in good knowledge and understanding about contemporary issues.

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

The quality of teaching in geography is outstanding.

- All teachers demonstrate excellent subject expertise and communicate well their enthusiasm for geography. Consequently, lessons are lively and often make excellent use of stimulating resources to engage the students' interest and curiosity. Very good use is made of multimedia resources and information and communication technology to introduce and explore a wide range of topical issues.
- Lessons are planned well and directed effectively. Students are supported well and are routinely encouraged to participate in learning through skilful questioning and carefully prepared pair and group activities.
- Teaching is underpinned by ambitious target-setting. Teachers use a range of techniques to assess students' understanding in lessons and guide their progress.
- Marking is regular, rigorous and constructive. However, its impact varies because teachers do not routinely follow up their guidance to check that students understand and act on the advice given.
- Excellent use is made of the outside environment and fieldwork to support learning. Students are routinely encouraged to apply what they have studied to wider contexts and to research issues for themselves.

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

The quality of the curriculum in geography is outstanding.

- The curriculum is skilfully designed to match the full range of students' needs and aspirations. Imaginative schemes of work are updated regularly to promote relevant, lively and stimulating lessons and ensure that students value and enjoy the subject.
- Students have high-quality opportunities to develop and consolidate key skills. Fieldwork is planned well in varied locations, including trips abroad, for example to Iceland. Students gain experience of fieldwork on a regular basis and develop systematically their skills in investigation and analysis, as well as an appreciation of different places and diverse landscapes.
- As well as developing key geographical concepts such as interdependence and sustainability, the curriculum places strong emphasis on developing students' personal learning and thinking skills. Students are encouraged to reflect on a wide range of local and global issues.
- External links, notably the recent work with a local primary school, have a significant impact on students' engagement with the subject. Suitable plans are in place to widen subject links and extend enrichment activities.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is outstanding.

- The department has a strong track record of success and improvement based on challenging target-setting, systematic self-evaluation and effective improvement planning.
- Leadership is highly effective in inspiring ambition and whole-hearted commitment from staff and students and is very well informed by subject expertise.
- A shared vision for the development of the subject is based soundly on what students can learn from geography as well as what they can learn about it. Fieldwork is regarded as an entitlement within the subject and is highly valued by staff.
- Staff are motivated to improve provision and readily research and innovate to strengthen and broaden their classroom practice. Effective strategies are in place to share good practice and to secure high-quality professional development.
- Geography has a very high profile in the life of the school and is implementing promising initiatives to develop the subject's impact within and beyond the school.

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

- implementing plans to develop the wider impact of geography within and beyond the school.

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 published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Paul Brooker**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**