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Mr D Bocock
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Bocock

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 13 and 14 October 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 students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is good.

- Attainment at GCSE has improved significantly over the last three years and is now above average. The proportion of students attaining the highest grades has increased significantly. The progress students make from their starting points is good and has improved in the last two years.
- The small number of students taking A level means that results fluctuate for year to year. Over the last two years, attainment has been broadly average. The progress made by the current students is good.
- In all lessons observed, students made good progress because of effective teaching. Although girls have recently outperformed boys in GCSE examinations, there was no difference in the rate of progress for different groups of students.

- Students demonstrate a good knowledge of places and physical processes. They understand and are able to use geographical terminology accurately.
- Students enjoy geography and can explain the value of studying the subject. They are interested in what is happening in the world and their place in it.
- Students' behaviour in all lessons observed was exemplary and contributed effectively to good learning.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching in geography is good.

- Teachers are well-qualified geographers with high levels of subject expertise that they apply effectively.
- Lesson planning is very detailed and learning expectations are set and shared with students.
- Teachers have high expectations of all students and this alongside the use of a wide range of, sometimes imaginative, teaching strategies results in their good progress.
- Students have good opportunities to work in pairs and groups. However, only on few occasions they are able to direct their own work.
- Teachers make good use of a range of resources, including the interactive whiteboard. Insufficient opportunities are planned for students to use information and communication technology, especially geographic information systems, as an integral part of lessons.
- Students' work is marked regularly and written feedback is generally informative, indicating what they need to do to improve.
- A good range of formal assessment activities is used to monitor students' progress. Students are developing an increasing understanding of National Curriculum levels and examination criteria, so they are better informed on how to achieve their targets.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is good.

- A clear overview of the curriculum from Years 7 to 13 is supported by detailed schemes of work in Key Stage 3 and outline plans for each unit at GCSE and A level.
- The curriculum is matched well to meet the needs of students and ensure progression in their learning.
- At Key Stage 3, the schemes of work are mapped carefully against the National Curriculum and the development of concept and key skills are identified.
- Some of the themes studied at GCSE and A level overlap. However, through an ongoing review, the department is now tackling this issue.

- Appropriate opportunities for fieldwork in all year groups are built into the schemes of work.
- The global dimension is woven through the curriculum and the department has plans in place to enhance its contribution to community cohesion. The links with external agencies are limited.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- The subject leader demonstrates a high level of up-to-date expertise and a clear sense of direction for the department.
- The subject leader has made a significant number of improvements, particularly in raising GCSE examination results. These, alongside the ambitious plans for the future, demonstrate an outstanding capacity for improvement.
- Self-evaluation is detailed and accurate and is based on a broad range of evidence collected from regularly conducted monitoring of the work of the department. The departmental action plan focuses on improvement in both outcomes and provision.
- Staff share a common purpose to improve provision and outcomes for students and good practice is readily shared across the department.
- Opportunities for subject-specific professional development are good and are not focused solely on examination board courses.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing opportunities for students to undertake independent learning
- increasing the use of information and communication technology in lessons, particularly geographic information systems, across all year groups
- broadening external links to promote further students' learning and engagement in geography.

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 Dowgill
Additional Inspector