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Mr C Willsher  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Willsher

### **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 1 and 2 February 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

### **Achievement in geography**

Achievement in geography is satisfactory.

- Students enter Year 7 having had a diverse range of geographical experiences in their primary schools. Attainment on entry is broadly average, but covers a wide range.
- Most students make sound progress through Key Stage 3. Students satisfactorily acquire knowledge and develop their understanding. They make sound progress in consolidating their geographical skills.
- This continues in Key Stage 4 so that attainment by the end of Year 11 is broadly average at both A\* and A and A\* to C. This has been the consistent picture over recent years. No significant difference exists in the attainment of girls and boys.

- However, school leaders are not content with this situation and have taken firm and decisive action to improve achievement in the subject. The recent appointment of a new head of department has led to the implementation of a number of changes, such as the revision of schemes of work, the production of revision guides and podcasts, along with increased student understanding of the mark scheme and how to structure their responses. In addition, teachers are targeting and intervening with those students on the A\*/A and C/D boundaries. These strategies are beginning to show signs of improvement, but they have not been implemented long enough to demonstrate sustained impact.
- Students' attitudes and behaviour in lessons are generally good. Most are well behaved and keen to learn, especially when they are set challenging tasks. Students show great maturity when dealing with complex and difficult issues, such as the geography of AIDS. Most take a pride in their work. Teachers enjoy positive relationships with students.

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

The quality of teaching in geography is satisfactory.

- In the large majority of lessons observed, the quality of teaching was good. Some lessons demonstrated outstanding features. This helped students make more rapid gains in their learning.
- All lessons are planned in detail and are well structured. They generally have a brisk pace and sequentially build on previous learning to extend students' thinking. Resources are carefully selected to make lessons interesting, engaging and demanding.
- Plentiful opportunities are provided for challenging discussions during which students contribute ideas and develop their thinking skills. Questions are widely distributed which increases student participation. Where activities are interesting and practical, students show high levels of enthusiasm and interest.
- However, students' books show some variability in the quality of teaching and learning. They reveal differences in depth of study, presentation, detail and expectations between one class and another.
- Marking is inconsistent. The best examples give students clear guidance about what they need to do next to improve but this is not constant. There are occasions when some students in some classes go for lengthy periods without their books being marked.
- Most students in Key Stage 4 have clear targets along with precise steps for improvement. However, in Key Stage 3, although end-of-unit assessment pieces, 'learning landmarks', and home studies are marked in detail, targets for improvement are not always provided. As a result, some students do not know what they need to do to achieve the next level.
- In discussion with students, many remain unsure about what level they are working at, the level they are working towards and precisely what they need to do to achieve it.

- Key Stage 3 assessment data are not routinely collected and analysed. Consequently, students' outcomes are not used to inform teaching and learning or intervene at an early stage when students are making less than expected progress or to challenge the higher attaining students to achieve their full potential.
- Homework is used appropriately to support activities taught in lessons. Students particularly enjoy the opportunity to make choices in the way they present their homework.

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

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- Following her appointment, the head of department has rightly prioritised the need to ensure that the Key Stage 4 curriculum is taught in sufficient depth. A number of refinements to the curriculum have been implemented by the department. These are beginning to pay dividends, resulting in increased student enjoyment, confidence and understanding.
- Ongoing work is being undertaken by the department to systematically revise the Key Stage 3 programmes of study to ensure a better balance between human and physical geography themes.
- Fieldwork opportunities are satisfactory. Plans to increase fieldwork provision to develop essential geographical skills by making greater use of the school grounds, the immediate locality and other planned opportunities further afield are in place.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) opportunities for students to study the subject are variable in school. Students occasionally have the opportunity to use the school's ICT suites to study the subject. Teachers use ICT routinely in the delivery of lessons through the use of videos and presentations. As part of their home studies, some students innovatively use ICT to present their work.
- Suitable opportunities are provided for students to develop their writing and mathematical skills, through for example writing diaries and postcards about life in Kenya or drawing graphs indicating where AIDS was most prevalent.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- This is a rapidly improving department with good capacity for ongoing improvement. The head of department has swiftly established a secure understanding of the issues facing the subject and is addressing these systematically.
- Departmental self-evaluation is accurate. A range of formal and informal monitoring and evaluation is undertaken. Outcomes are used to identify priorities for improvement.

- A range of strategies designed to raise standards is being successfully implemented in Key Stage 4, particularly targeting those students on grade boundaries and increasing students' understanding of what they need to do to improve. Improvements are becoming established and they are beginning to have a positive impact on increasing rates of progress and raising attainment.
- Attendance at local secondary geography meetings is proving beneficial. The department is subscribed or affiliated to a number of professional bodies and associations and makes good use of support and resources.

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

- ensuring a consistent approach to teaching and learning so that all students in the same year group have similar experiences
- ensuring that marking and assessment informs students precisely of their next steps in learning
- ensuring that all students in Key Stage 3 know and understand their targets and are clear about what they need to do next to improve
- establishing a monitoring system in Key Stage 3, along with subsequent analysis of outcomes, to target and intervene with those students at risk of falling behind and to further challenge the more able.

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 Weston**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**