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Mr D Pearson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Pearson

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 31 January and 1 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 nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is good.

- Students' attainment is above average and they make good progress across all key stages. Some inconsistencies of progress between different groups of students are evident during lessons but revision sessions, individual interventions and students' very strong work ethic help them to achieve well.
- Students have a good understanding of how human and physical environments are interrelated and a strong basis of core geographical knowledge.
- Students use a wide range of information sources to investigate geographical issues and present their findings in varied ways through

creative approaches. Increasingly, students' geographical studies are helping them develop interest in contemporary issues.

- Geography makes a positive contribution to the development of students' personal skills and to their understanding of sustainability. Relationships between students and with staff are positive.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching of geography is good.

- Teachers have high expectations of students.
- Teachers have good subject expertise and a clear understanding of the value of geography.
- Teachers use a good range of strategies which most students find engaging and this helps to promote good progress. The use of group work is limited by the size of the geography rooms in Key Stage 3.
- The use of maps at a range of scales promotes learning well but fewer opportunities exist to develop learning through the use of information and communication technology (ICT).
- Students are supported well through individual interventions which check their understanding, particularly in Key Stage 4 and post-16. However, a full range of assessment strategies is not yet fully embedded and the quality of marking is too variable. Teachers' planning does not consistently take account of the information provided through assessment.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- The curriculum has a strong focus on key geographical concepts such as place, space, diversity and sustainability. In addition it is sufficiently flexible for there to be good opportunities for students to learn about topical issues.
- The curriculum provides appropriate opportunities for students to develop enquiry skills and to communicate their findings orally, in writing and through the use of geographical diagrams. However, the geography curriculum does not provide a strong contribution to the development of students' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.
- Students are prepared well for examination requirements that are underpinned by the collection of first-hand evidence. However, students' fieldwork skills are not developed progressively across the key stages.
- The curriculum meets the needs and interests of most students. However, it is not always sufficiently well tailored to build on students' own experiences or to meet the different learning needs of the least and most able students.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- The strong sense of teamwork in the department facilitates the sharing of ideas and is supportive of non-specialist staff. Individual staff expertise in particular aspects of geography is taken into account well in planning teacher deployment. Staff are well-informed about current developments in geography.
- Although systems for subject review are predominantly informal, they are clearly focused on continuing to raise students' achievement through improvements to provision. For example, data analysis identified the levels of attainment of the highest grades at GCSE as an issue and this is being successfully addressed through apt monitoring and intervention.
- The department engages well with the whole-school monitoring systems and targets are appropriately used to challenge students and to monitor their progress. Tutorials are well organised and make a strong contribution to students' achievement.
- Improvement plans have relevant priorities but they make limited reference to how progress will be monitored and evaluated. The department recognises the need to improve the progressive development of fieldwork skills, especially during Key Stage 3, and increase the emphasis on outdoor learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing a comprehensive and progressive range of fieldwork opportunities in Key Stage 3
- adapting the curriculum to ensure that it fully meets the learning needs and interests of different groups of students and supports the development of their basic skills
- developing further the use of a range of assessment strategies and the way that information gained is used to inform planning
- increasing the rigour of monitoring and evaluation in planning for improvement.

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

Sonya Williamson
Her Majesty's Inspector