

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



2 March 2011

Mr G Ironside  
Headteacher  
Sutton Grammar School for Boys  
Manor Lane  
Sutton  
Surrey  
SM1 4AS

Dear Mr Ironside

### **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 14 and 15 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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

### **Achievement in geography**

Achievement in geography is outstanding.

- Students' attainment at GCSE and A level in 2010 was high, maintaining the high standards of the previous three years.
- Students demonstrate a very good knowledge of a range of places at different scales and understand how they are interdependent and interconnected. They have a high-level understanding of the subject's key concepts and are able to apply geographical theories to places and events that they have studied.
- Written work is detailed and students are able to construct coherent essays synthesising key aspects of the subject. Their map and graphical skills are of a high standard.

- Given their starting points, the students who study GCSE geography make outstanding progress. Generally, progress across Key Stage 3 is good.
- Students enjoy geography and demonstrate very positive attitudes towards learning. This is reflected in their exemplary behaviour.

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

The quality of teaching of geography is good.

- Teachers have a passion for geography, high expectations of the students and demonstrate up-to-date subject knowledge, which they use effectively in lessons.
- In most lessons, teachers use an appropriate range of strategies to promote good learning. However, in some lessons there is a tendency for too much teacher talk.
- Where teaching is outstanding, teachers plan lessons that actively engage students in their learning and give them responsibility to make choices. Groupwork is used very effectively in these lessons.
- The use of information and communication technology to support learning is variable. Where it is used most effectively, it provides an excellent stimulus for learning and is a key resource to support the planned activities.
- Students are provided with regular oral and written feedback on the quality of their work and know what they have to do to improve. Teachers' written comments, however, do not always indicate clearly enough the precise actions students should take to make improvements.

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

The quality of the curriculum in geography is good.

- The curriculum provides a broad and balanced geographical experience for students and is planned so that key themes are progressively developed across each key stage.
- There is a clear outline plan of the units taught across Year 7 to Year 13, with a detailed scheme of work for each.
- At Key Stage 3, the key concepts of the National Curriculum are embedded in some units but not all. Certain units lack recent and relevant content.
- Planning for fieldwork is developing but currently does not provide students with experiences that allow for the progressive development of their skills in varied locations.
- The department's virtual learning environment, the Moodle, is a powerful resource to support out-of-school learning and provides a comprehensive library of information; older students in particular appreciate the benefits of being able to access this out of school.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is outstanding.

- The relatively new head of department has a clear, well-articulated vision for geography and a high level of recent and relevant subject expertise to draw on in putting the vision into action.
- The head of department is committed to the development of geography and has introduced a number of initiatives that are having a positive impact on learning.
- The recent subject review is detailed and well informed by current departmental practice and has resulted in a development plan that focuses on improving the quality of teaching and the curriculum while sustaining the outstanding student outcomes.
- Morale in the department is high and the head of department inspires confidence in the staff and students. The subject has a high profile in the school and leads on a number of initiatives.
- The capacity for further improvement is outstanding.

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

- ensuring that the best practice in active and independent learning is fully embedded across the department
- establishing a programme of fieldwork across the key stages to provide students with the opportunities to progressively develop their skills and competencies in this key aspect of 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**