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Dear Dr Goodman

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 15 and 16 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 the school with a wide range of abilities and a variety of geographical experiences.
- By the end of Key Stage 3, all students make at least satisfactory, and some make good, progress to achieve standards in line with national expectations.
- Attainment at Key Stage 4 showed a five-year-trend of continuous improvement from 2003 to 2008. Geography results dipped in 2009 and remained below average in 2010. Appropriate action has been taken to tackle the issues of underachievement, stabilise staffing and ensure that a part-time member of staff offers clear leadership to the department. Inspection evidence confirms that students are currently making good

progress at Key Stage 4 and are on track to meet their challenging targets in 2012.

- Relationships between students and with staff are positive and behaviour in lessons is usually good.
- Students appreciate the 'fun' way in which geography is taught, the opportunities to research and present information in a variety of ways and how the subject allows them to look at contemporary issues, for example, the use of sweat shops to produce garments for the fashion industry.

Quality of teaching in geography

The quality of teaching in geography is good.

- Geography is taught by four teachers, two of whom are subject specialists. All of the teaching observed was at least satisfactory and the majority was good. One lesson was outstanding.
- Teachers have very good subject expertise and are enthusiastic about teaching geography.
- In the good and outstanding lessons, students make good progress because sessions are planned in detail to ensure that they complete interesting tasks with understanding and at a good pace. Levels of interaction are good. Teachers use skilful questioning to challenge students' thinking and students are actively involved in their own learning.
- In satisfactory lessons, work is not matched precisely enough to students' learning needs which results in a lack of challenge. Consequently, the pace of learning slows and students do not make as much progress as they should.
- Students acquire good mapwork and information and communication technology (ICT) skills and a wide range of knowledge and understanding from the enjoyable enquiry projects they are involved in.
- They use a wide range of information sources to investigate geographical issues, including geographical information systems (GIS) and present their findings in a variety of imaginative ways.
- Assessment is accurate. End-of-unit assessments are planned carefully, marked in great detail and provide very good guidance to students. Students are actively involved in assessing their own and others' work.
- Teachers provide detailed support for GCSE controlled assessments and good levels of help with revision and examination technique. This is contributing well to raising attainment in the subject and ensuring that students are entered for the correct level of examination.
- Students understand what level they are working at and the level they are working towards. Very good use is made of learning walls, in classrooms and in corridors, to support this.
- Effective use is made of homework to consolidate students' learning.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced. Knowledge and understanding are developed progressively across both key stages.
- Geography curriculum documentation provides a useful framework but does not as yet reflect recent changes to the curriculum and the new geography syllabus in use at Key Stage 4.
- The curriculum has a good focus on key geographical concepts such as place, space, diversity and sustainability. In addition, it is sufficiently flexible to provide good opportunities for students to learn about topical issues.
- Geography is used well to engage students' interest with issues linked to social justice, poverty and natural disasters. A particular strength of the department is the emphasis it places on development issues and the opportunities this provides for students to learn about inequalities and to value diversity. In a Year 10 lesson observed, students made their own movies to evaluate the success of strategies to reduce global inequalities.
- The curriculum provides appropriate opportunities for students to develop independent and group enquiry skills and to communicate their findings. However, students are not currently receiving their fieldwork entitlement. The subject leader is aware of the need to re-establish a comprehensive and progressive range of appropriate fieldwork opportunities at each key stage.
- ICT is embedded in the geography curriculum. Effective use is also made of the college's learning platform to consolidate and challenge students' learning.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- The part-time subject leader is conscientious and committed. The school is currently reviewing subject leadership arrangements to ensure that the department continues to be rigorously managed and the subject continues to develop.
- The strong sense of teamwork in the department facilitates the sharing of ideas and is supportive of non-specialist staff.
- A range of effective formal and informal monitoring and evaluation takes place at department, faculty and whole-school level with a strong emphasis on student outcomes. Good use is made of external review at faculty level to benchmark its quality.
- The subject team has responded positively to the school's drive to raise attainment, eradicate underachievement and to improve the quality of provision.

- Teachers keep their subject knowledge up to date through engagement with local networks and links with the local authority's subject adviser. The department makes good use of training and resources provided by the subject associations.
- The department has made an important contribution to the impact of the college's humanities specialism. This includes the development of whole-school teaching, learning and assessment strategies, the use of ICT and its work on global awareness with local feeder primary schools.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the number of students achieving grades A* to C at GCSE
- increasing the amount of pace and challenge in lessons to ensure that all students make the progress they should
- ensuring that the geography curriculum is strategically reviewed to reflect recent changes to the curriculum, the new syllabus in use at Key Stage 4 and to provide students with their curriculum entitlement to fieldwork in both key stages
- ensuring that the long-term arrangements for subject leadership are clarified to facilitate the rigorous management and continued development of the subject in 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

Angela Milner
Her Majesty's Inspector