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Mrs S Lowe  
Headteacher  
Tolworth Girls' School and Centre for Continuing Education  
Fullers Way North  
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Dear Mrs Lowe

### **Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: geography**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 18 and 19 May 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 yourself, staff, students and a trainee teacher; 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 good.

- Achievement is good in Key Stage 3 as students are helped effectively to consolidate and build on their map skills. Practical activities and fieldwork in the locality ensure that students new to the area become familiar with their environment.
- A satisfactory proportion of students takes GCSE and 75% gain A\* to C grades. This is above the national average. Students take the appropriate level papers and their work shows confidence in using Geographical Information Systems (GIS); such as in their river study work.
- Students are confident in their use of information and communication technology (ICT) for presentations and to present their fieldwork data. However, access in some rooms is limited.

- The number taking the subject in the sixth form fluctuates. Currently, you have a cohort in Year 11 but no Year 12 A2 candidates. Results are generally good at AS level; although cooperation with another school to make the subject viable has meant reduced oversight to ensure that students always reach their maximum potential. Students who proceed to A2 are taught at Tolworth and consistently do well.

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

The quality of teaching in geography is good.

- Lessons are well planned and briskly paced. Students diligently cover a wide range of material and learn to apply themselves well to the good assortment of tasks offered.
- Students are able to analyse problems using good reasoning skills and insight because teachers help them to develop and extend their initial ideas. They learn well as the examples and case studies used are carefully selected and topical.
- Very good attention is given to ensuring that those new to learning English know and understand the key vocabulary.
- Students are encouraged to role play and show empathy. During observations, they were suitably concerned for the imaginary couple who could not get insurance for their bungalow. Through this imaginative activity, they came to understand the impact of coastal erosion on humans.
- Their ability to interpret data and to use maps and GIS develops well because teachers introduce material in a carefully planned progression. Students identified that they preferred digital maps and appeared less confident using ordnance survey maps at a range of scales.
- Year 8 cross-curricular teaching successfully promotes an understanding of concepts, such as Fair Trade and population movement. They are effective in motivating and engaging students in global and sustainability issues. Teachers cooperate well across departments to ensure high-quality work and experiences for students of all abilities including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- GCSE teaching is of a high standard and students benefit from the mixed-ability classes and the cooperative learning that teachers foster successfully.

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

The quality of the curriculum in geography is good.

- The curriculum is well designed and is taught and extended by skilled subject specialists. The school has retained a traditional approach to geography in Year 7. Once students' skills are well embedded they are taught thematically in Year 8. Cross-curricular topics are well selected to ensure that individual subject skills are still effectively developed within a broad theme.

- The GCSE syllabus has been carefully chosen. Students benefit from appropriate fieldwork, however, the most recent AS cohort has missed out on fieldwork. This has the potential to undermine the quality of work and recruitment at A level.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- The department is well managed. The staff keep up to date, they are members of the relevant associations and host events for other colleagues in the south west of London.
- Monitoring is effective both on a day-to-day basis and through the senior management structure. Teachers are accountable for the progress of students of all abilities and expectations are high.
- The target-setting process is currently being refined. Targets are aspirational.
- Teaching is well monitored and assessments at all levels are secure and thorough. The external examination arrangements have been moderated and commended.
- The department is forward-thinking and has a clear self-evaluation process which identifies GIS training as a priority for further development.
- The head of department is a strong advocate for geography and leads by setting high standards in her own classroom work.

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

- ensuring that fieldwork is reinstated into the AS course so that students get first-hand experience and their entitlement is met
- improve the accessibility to ICT in all the geography rooms.

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

**Mo Roberts**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**