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3 June 2011

Mrs H McIlroy
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs McIlroy

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 19 and 20 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 staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is good overall, but there are some wide variations across key stages and classes.

- Students cover the full ability range but the majority are above the national average. They arrive with a wide range of experiences from their primary schools.
- Students are very well prepared for their examinations. Standards at GCSE are high with 85% of students attaining A* to C grades in 2010. This is well above the national average.
- Progress at GCSE varies across the cohort. When progress is good, and sometimes outstanding, students use geographical vocabulary confidently, are able to apply reasoned thinking and have good core knowledge about places and geographical concepts. Where progress is satisfactory, students

show good knowledge and a grasp of the facts but are less able to analyse and explain.

- At Key Stage 3, overall progress is satisfactory. Progress is often good where units of work are well planned, but more limited when units lack structure or substance.
- The development of geographical skills is also variable. Students develop very good fieldwork skills because fieldwork is progressively developed year on year. Map skills are sometimes taught in isolation or are not linked to real places. Geographical information systems (GIS) are currently ignored.
- Behaviour in most lessons is good. However, in a very small minority of lessons, where students lack clarity in direction and are unsure of what they are expected to do, an undercurrent of silly behaviour can disrupt learning.
- There is a very high take-up at GCSE because students particularly enjoy the well-organised fieldwork programme and recall these as the really memorable moments in their overall geographical experience.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching in geography is good overall but with some significant variations across classes.

- Where teaching is good, and at times outstanding, activities build progressively at a rapid pace. Questioning challenges thinking and effective use is made of relevant video clips and other visual resources to engage students and encourage discussion.
- Where teaching is satisfactory, and on occasions poor, the focus is on providing information to students. In these lessons, the more able students are often occupied rather than stimulated.
- Students are familiar with working both collaboratively and independently. Fieldwork activities support the good development of interpersonal and social skills alongside the geography.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used frequently by teachers for exposition. Where visual resources are used to interact with students, good learning often takes place. However, in satisfactory lessons, ICT is often used as a source of information, replacing the blackboard.
- Students rarely use ICT in lessons, although most have access at home and use it for research purposes. The recent acquisition of sets of 'notebooks' is now beginning to encourage more frequent classroom use.
- Work is generally marked, but comments are often praise than clearly diagnostic.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory overall.

- At Key Stage 3, there is an overview which, in theory, should ensure coverage of statutory requirements. In reality, many units are incomplete. As a result, the Key Stage 3 curriculum is fragmented.
- At Key Stage 4, the sample scheme of work provided by the examination board provides a more focused framework for learning.
- The school makes very good use of topicality, such as the recent earthquake in New Zealand and tsunami in Japan, to make learning relevant.
- Fieldwork is a strength and is progressively developed at Key Stage 3 with students measuring the quality of the environment around the school, studying coastal landforms at Lulworth Cove and exploring the impact of tourism on the environment in the New Forest. This provides a good repertoire of skills for students to develop at GCSE.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is satisfactory.

- Currently, there is no subject leader and management responsibility for the subject is shared among teachers. The subject is being maintained rather than developed.
- The department is well staffed with four specialist geographers who have good subject knowledge.
- Monitoring of the curriculum and quality of students' work is weak because currently there are no clear lines of accountability.
- Subject-specific professional development has been limited mainly to meetings at examination boards linked to advice on controlled assessment or coverage. No use has been made of the resources and support available from the subject associations.
- Resources are adequate overall, but are more limited where units of work remain unplanned. In weaker lessons, there is often an overuse of worksheets.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that a clear leadership structure is established to make certain that there is greater accountability in :
 - curriculum planning
 - monitoring of teaching and learning and quality of students' work
- producing a scheme of work for Key Stage 3 to ensure full coverage and the progressive development of geographical knowledge and understanding
- ensuring greater consistency in teaching and learning across all classes to make certain that more teaching is good or better

- integrating the use of GIS into the curriculum to make certain that statutory requirements are met
- using the resources and support provided by the subject associations to support improvements in provision.

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

Leszek Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector