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19 July 2011

Mr D Taylor  
Principal  
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Dear Mr Taylor

### **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 5 and 6 July 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 and a short visit to a controlled assessment session. Few lessons were available for observation due to the absence of Year 11 and because a number of sessions were being taught by a PGCE student in the final phase of his placement.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

### **Achievement in geography**

Achievement in geography is satisfactory overall with some variations across key stages and classes.

- Students enter the school with a wide range of experiences in geography. Across Key Stage 3, they generally make satisfactory progress, gaining a sound understanding of many of the key geographical concepts especially space, place, diversity, interdependence and sustainability.
- By the end of Year 9, students have studied a broad range of places. However, most students do not make adequate progress in their acquisition and application of mapping or fieldwork skills because their

exposure to these components of geography is intermittent. Currently, only a minority of students have the opportunity to experience fieldwork.

- Standards at GCSE have varied from year to year, were low in 2010, but are satisfactory overall. Students' progress is also variable but is no better than satisfactory, especially when compared with other subjects in the school.
- Girls are generally more conscientious than the boys in their approach to both classwork and homework. Boys' immature behaviour, particularly in Key Stage 3, sometimes disrupts the learning of others.

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

The quality of teaching in geography is satisfactory.

- Teaching is variable across classes. A genuine attempt is being made to broaden the range of approaches to engage students better in their learning. However, application is not consistent across lessons.
- Teachers use an increasingly wide range of resources to support learning and frequent use is made of new technology to aid exposition. However, students' access to, and use of, computers is very limited.
- Students are less engaged in those lessons where teachers do not challenge disruptive behaviour. In these lessons, especially, there is often a lack of clarity in explaining to the students what they are expected to do. Questioning is often weak and does not progressively develop students' thinking and understanding.
- There is also a tendency in too many lessons to control the learning and guide students to the answer rather than encourage thinking.
- Students' work is generally marked regularly, but this is not consistent across classes or year groups. It does not always identify what students need to do next to improve.
- Assessment judgements are generally accurate, especially at GCSE where the application of examination marking criteria is good. At Key Stage 3, assessment procedures are currently being reviewed and there is a greater emphasis on independent learning projects. However, the quality of these is variable and is dependent on whether the tasks set focus sufficiently on geographical outcomes and challenge students of all abilities.
- Currently, particularly at Key Stage 3, teaching is focused on meeting the needs of middle and lower ability students. More able students are not always challenged by the tasks set. In particular, opportunities to write geographically at length are limited. Creative writing may support literacy but the geography often provides a context rather than good learning in the subject.

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

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is currently under review and schemes of work are being adjusted to ensure that a wider range of resources and teaching and learning approaches are planned to engage students.
- It is planned to reduce the number of units to be taught each year as, currently, there is too much detail to cover, resulting in some units not being completed in the summer term.
- A good mix of units ensures progressive coverage of key geographical concepts. A wide range of case studies enables students to become aware of a range of contrasting localities around the globe.
- Although a unit on Japan has been developed as a result of a study visit to that country, 'International Schools' status has not been used to support learning in geography. The school has well-established links with schools in Holland and Germany but these have not been developed to enhance the curriculum and learning about place.
- Insufficient attention is given to the development of geographical skills. Map skills are covered in Year 7 but are often taught in isolation from the study of real places. The use of geographical information systems (GIS) is underused. Teachers sometimes use features such as Google Earth for exposition, but students do not have sufficient access to technology to support their learning.
- Fieldwork is completed at GCSE to ensure that students are able to complete their controlled assessment. Recently, some elements of fieldwork have been introduced into Key Stage 3. Currently, these experiences are enrichment opportunities to which all students do not have access. As a result, most students do not have the opportunity to develop their skills of primary data collection, synthesis and analysis.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is satisfactory.

- Leaders are reasonably aware of the current developments in geography. There is a clear desire and enthusiasm to change the culture of the subject by developing a more relevant curriculum and through the use of a greater variety of teaching approaches which focuses on learning as opposed to prescriptive guidance. As a result, the subject is currently undergoing a period of transition.
- Monitoring of provision has not been rigorous enough to identify weaknesses in classroom management and delivery which are holding back students, particularly the more able, from making good progress in their learning. Self-evaluation is aspirational rather than a realistic analysis of the quality of provision.
- Good use has been made of some of the planning and resources provided by the subject associations to begin to promote a more relevant and appropriate curriculum.
- Although the training provided by the subject associations has not been used, attendance on courses such as the 'Outstanding Teacher' course has

stimulated the desire to improve the quality of delivery in the classroom. However, as yet, this has not been cascaded through the department.

- The changes being initiated show that there is satisfactory capacity for improvement and an awareness that the pace of change needs to be accelerated.

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

- enhancing classroom delivery by:
  - improving the clarity of instruction to enable students to access the tasks and understand what is expected of them
  - improving responses from students through properly sequenced questioning which progressively develops thinking and understanding
  - challenging disruptive behaviour so that the pace of learning can be maintained
  - making better use of the good visual resources available to engage students and communicate points clearly
- restructuring the curriculum, especially at Key Stage 3, to ensure that:
  - it is relevant and topical and meets the needs of students better
  - it is manageable and progressively builds on students' knowledge and understanding
  - mapping skills and the use of GIS are developed through each key stage
  - fieldwork entitlement is inclusive of all students at Key Stage 3.

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**