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Mr I Storey
Principal
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Dear Mr Storey

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 five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is satisfactory.

- Students' attainment in the geography GCSE examinations has been low for the last two years. This, in part, has been due to staff turnover and a lack of continuity in teachers deployed to examination classes. The results of the current Year 11, although likely to remain low, are set to improve significantly on those of the previous year.
- In the last two years, there has been a considerable improvement in the standards reached by students at the end of Year 9. These are now generally in line with national expectations, with an increasing proportion of students exceeding this.
- Given their starting points, the few students who have studied A level in the last two years have made the progress expected.

- Students' progress over time is good in Key Stage 3 and satisfactory, but improving securely, in Key Stage 4. In lessons, students make good progress in their learning.
- Students generally have a good knowledge of the location of range of places and are developing an understanding of how and why they are interconnected. They are familiar with geographical vocabulary and use this with confidence. When presented with the opportunity, they are able to research and present evidence in a range of ways, some to a high standard.
- Behaviour in lessons is good and students, particularly in Key Stage 3, enjoy geography and are engaged well in their learning.

Quality of teaching in geography

The quality of teaching in geography is good.

- Teachers clearly understand the value and relevance of geography and, whenever possible, ensure through their teaching that this is made apparent to the students.
- Lesson planning is meticulous and one outcome of this is the effective way in which teachers meet the needs of individual students through the use of tailored activities, resources, assessment and extension work.
- Typical geography teaching includes the effective use of a broad range of active learning strategies to challenge students to think as geographers, to analyse, and to present the reasoning behind the answers that they give. Group and pair work is used well to involve students in their learning.
- Targeted questioning is used very well to ensure that all students are involved in lessons and is supported by the thoughtful use of praise.
- Teachers are confident in their use of information and communication technology (ICT), especially interactive whiteboards, to support effective teaching and learning. Where students have the opportunity to use ICT this promotes learning well. Currently, however, there is only limited use of geographical information systems.
- Students are formally assessed through a variety of methods on a regular basis. Students are fully aware of their target levels and grades and know what they need to do to improve. Marking of work is frequent and helps to ensure that students keep up to date.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum provides students with a broad and balanced experience of geography with some relevant units of work and up-to-date case studies used.
- Schemes of work identify the key concepts covered in each unit and are supported by detailed lesson-by-lesson plans. The development of key geographical skills, particularly mapwork and fieldwork, is evident in the

planning. However, there is no overview of the curriculum to indicate how the required concepts, skills and fieldwork are developed across the key stage.

- The GCSE specification has recently been reviewed and changed to meet the needs of the students more effectively. Schemes of work support each unit but there is a need to ensure that the different units are seen by students to be of equal interest and importance.
- All the necessary curriculum planning for A level is in place.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is satisfactory.

- Self-evaluation across the humanities faculty is broadly accurate and identifies the main issues, but this is not transferred into key improvement targets for specific subjects.
- Detailed improvement planning is in place at the faculty level. However, this does not have a sufficiently sharp focus on improving students' outcomes at the subject level, particularly GCSE attainment, and lacks clear success criteria against which to measure the impact of teaching and other initiatives that develop and support students' learning.
- Regular, accurate monitoring using a range of strategies, including lesson observation and work scrutiny, is undertaken but the evidence from this is not used well enough to improve students' outcomes.
- The teacher in charge of geography demonstrates good capacity to improve through her awareness of current developments in the subject and the clear plans as to how the subject should develop.
- The teacher in charge of geography has successfully developed a common purpose among the geography staff who, as a result, work effectively as a team. She has established consistently good teaching as the norm, and has overseen the improved uptake of students opting to study geography at both GCSE and A level.
- Teachers have good access to professional development, especially that linked to examinations, use the subject association and other groups well and willingly share good practice.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the GCSE examination results so that in 2012 they are broadly in line with the national average
- reviewing the Key Stage 3 curriculum so that there is a clear overview of how the key concepts, skills and fieldwork are developed across the three years
- ensuring that improvement planning has a much sharper focus on improving students' outcomes and includes clear success criteria so that the impact of all initiatives can be rigorously evaluated.

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.

Yours sincerely

Paul Dowgill
Additional Inspector