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Ms H Price  
Headteacher  
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Dear Ms Price

### **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 26 and 27 September 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 satisfactory.

- Students join the school with skills and understanding that are broadly in line with the levels expected. Some students achieve well, but progress is satisfactory at each key stage, including in the sixth form.
- Standards are rising steadily. Results in GCSE examinations in 2011 were broadly in line with national figures, although comparatively few students gained the higher A\* and A grades. Sixth-form students make expected progress, given their starting points.
- In lessons, the quality of learning is at least satisfactory and sometimes good. Students develop a sound geographical knowledge, an understanding of physical and human processes and are able to apply these to a range of different contexts.

- Students learn to think spatially and use maps, visual images and new technologies, including geographical information systems (GIS), to obtain, present and analyse information. Most acquire basic fieldwork skills.
- Geography makes a very strong contribution to students' wider understanding of environmental and global issues, and hence their personal development. For example, students are unusually well informed about environmental matters and have positive attitudes on stewardship and sustainability. They enjoy their active involvement in promoting wider awareness and positive action on environmental concerns.

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

The quality of teaching in geography is satisfactory.

- Teaching is lively and engaging. The positive relationships between adults and students create a good climate for learning and ensure that lessons start promptly and proceed apace.
- Teachers work hard to prepare resources that stimulate ideas and impart plenty of information, often making good use of information and communication technology (ICT). They use their good subject knowledge to make high-quality presentations and clear exposition.
- The quality of learning is too often uneven because planned outcomes and/or lesson activities are not sufficiently well matched to the aptitudes of the students. Tasks are occasionally inaccessible for some groups and sometimes too easy. Students are expected to listen for too long, or to respond to questions for which they have had no opportunity to prepare.
- Although lessons have suitably challenging learning objectives, planned outcomes are not sufficiently well defined, so assessments of students' understanding and progress lack sharp geographical focus. Consequently, although marking is conscientious and encouraging, it rarely identifies specific strengths or points for improvement.

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

The quality of the curriculum in geography is good.

- The curriculum provides for a range of students' needs and ensures that they make satisfactory progress in their learning. It provides sufficient opportunities for students to develop and consolidate key geographical skills of graphicacy, enquiry and investigation, including fieldwork.
- The subject offers some excellent enrichment opportunities, often in conjunction with other agencies and the wider community. The promotion of environmental awareness is developed and embedded across the school.
- Initiatives linked with the college specialism, such as the 'Connecting Classrooms' and 'Comenius Project', ensure that global perspectives permeate the curriculum. Projects present unique opportunities for students, some of which are 'life changing'. In addition, each project is also developed into cross-curricular learning for the benefit of all students.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is satisfactory, with good capacity for improvement.

- Since her recent appointment, the subject leader has effectively managed the subject's growth, including the development of vocational pathways in Key Stage 4. Geography is an increasingly popular option, particularly at GCSE.
- Departmental initiatives, such as the work of the Green Team, ensure that geography has a very high profile in the life of the college, as well as in the local community and beyond. The Green Team influences the everyday running of the college. Its achievements include producing a Green Game for schools and an 'application' for mobile telephones based on the local environment.
- The subject leader is aware of current developments in geography and is a leading light for cross-curricular initiatives within the college. Moreover, she works effectively with local secondary and primary schools to disseminate best practice in environmental work.
- Provision for the subject is monitored and reviewed regularly. There is a sound understanding of the strengths and priorities for improvement. Suitable steps have been taken to improve examination results.

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

- improving standards by accelerating students' progress through increasing the proportion of good and outstanding lessons, in particular by:
  - defining more ambitious outcomes for different groups
  - ensuring that planned tasks actively engage all students
  - sharpening the focus and impact of ongoing assessment and marking.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop geography in the school.

As 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Paul Brooker**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**