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Dr H Macaulay
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Dear Dr Macaulay

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 23 and 24 February 2012 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 one assembly and seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography in the secondary school is satisfactory.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is satisfactory.

- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is low. Students generally make satisfactory progress as they move from Year 7 to Year 9. A majority develop some basic geographical knowledge of where places are and what they are like but others are confused and less clear.
- Some basic mapwork skills are supported and developed. Students have opportunities to use maps and atlases but not on a consistent enough basis to reinforce and embed these skills sufficiently.
- Fieldwork skills remain underdeveloped because, currently, the learning programme does not provide sufficient relevant good-quality experiences to enable students to make adequate progress in the acquisition and application of these skills.

- Numbers of students opting for the subject at GCSE have shown recent improvement. Attainment has also improved and now is just below national expectations. Students are well prepared for examinations. Additional focused revision support has helped improve outcomes and ensures that most make good progress. However, few students attain the highest grades.
- Students generally have an increasingly positive attitude to the subject. However, there are some inconsistencies in behaviour in some classes with incidences of low-level disruption from a small number of students which prevent others from making better progress.

Quality of teaching in geography

The quality of teaching in geography is satisfactory.

- Teaching strategies promote a satisfactory level of learning across the majority of aspects of the subject. However, there are variations across classes.
- Low-level disruption occurs in those classes where tasks set lack clarity or expected outcomes are unclear. In these classes, low-level tasks may be used to occupy students rather than progress their learning.
- Questioning often focuses on simple factual recall and on individual students rather than involving several in the conversation to prompt better discussion and thinking.
- Teachers regularly use new technology to engage students visually. Sometimes this is used effectively to bring learning to life and interact with students. At other times it is used merely to impart information.
- Limited use is currently being made of geographical information systems (GIS) to enhance learning. Students are familiar with some elements such as Google Earth and Google maps but they have had no exposure to more complex systems which enable them to search, select, organise, investigate and refine geographical information in greater depth and detail.
- Students are aware of their targets and receive frequent feedback. They are able to identify geography-specific improvements to their work. However, the frequency of this is inconsistent with school policy and varies across classes.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory overall.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum continues to be a work in progress. The overview of teaching units promotes a well-balanced curriculum focused around an enquiry approach. However, individual units of work vary in quality and some are incomplete.
- There is insufficient study of places and case studies in sufficient depth to enable students to locate these with confidence or to develop a good

understanding of the world around them and the issues which impact on them.

- In examination classes, there is an over-reliance on the outline teaching programme provided by the examination board rather than utilising this framework to provide a more personalised course more suited to the students in the school.
- At Key Stage 3, there is no clear programme of geographical fieldwork to ensure the progressive development of these key geographical skills. In examination classes fieldwork requirements are met.
- Opportunities to use geography to enhance literacy and students' social and cultural development are not fully used.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is satisfactory.

- The school is well organised with roles and structures clearly defined. There is a clear line of management responsibility and expectation of accountability through self-evaluation.
- Departmental self-evaluation has not identified, with sufficient accuracy, gaps in curriculum provision or specific factors limiting learning for some students. Areas of weakness have not been sufficiently challenged.
- Resources to support learning are adequate and geography is becoming established as an increasingly popular subject.
- The department has not kept fully informed about current developments in the subject although it has recently recognised this and joined the Geographical Association. The support provided by the subject associations has not been fully used to improve provision.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- making certain that management becomes more accountable in ensuring that:
 - the taught curriculum at both Key Stage 3 and in examination classes covers the study of a range of appropriate places in depth and supports the progressive development of geographical skills, knowledge and understanding
 - fieldwork and the use of GIS becomes more firmly embedded into the learning framework
 - students' core geographical knowledge is developed in terms of using geographical vocabulary appropriately and knowing the location of places
- improving teaching and learning by:
 - raising aspirations through challenging all students, particularly the most able

- making best use of limited time to maintain a good pace of learning to ensure that all students achieve
 - developing appropriate questioning techniques to engage and challenge all students
 - providing different activities to meet the needs of all students
- making use of the resources and support provided by the subject associations to enhance subject expertise and improve learning for students.

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.

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector