

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



12 March 2012

Mrs N Davis
Headteacher
Aldersley High School
Barnhurst Lane
Codsall
Wolverhampton
WV8 1RT

Dear Mrs Davis

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 29 February and 1 March 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 eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is good.

- Students enter Year 7 with standards that are significantly below average. They experience a varied range of geographical experiences in their feeder primary schools.
- Throughout Key Stage 3, students make good progress, especially those known to be eligible for free school meals or those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Students develop a good understanding of physical and human geography following their study of themes such as 'Population', 'Volcanoes' and 'Rivers and floods'.
- Those students who study geography at GCSE level are interested, motivated and engaged in their work. Consequently, they make good progress. Over the past three years attainment has risen significantly and

is now above the national average at all levels. Girls achieve better than boys.

- Robust data analysis enables school leaders to precisely identify groups who are making slower progress. Equipped with this information, the department employs a wide range of strategies, such as catch up sessions and weekend classes, to address areas of weakness and close the gaps.
- Topical issues such as 'Brazil and the Rainforest' and 'Sport and the Olympics' are studied. These give students a good knowledge and understanding of wider geographical issues, including global problems and recent events. Students have a good grasp of basic skills in geography and their conceptual thinking is well developed.
- Students' attitudes and behaviour in lessons are good. They are well behaved and keen to learn especially when they are set challenging tasks. Most take a pride in their work. Relationships in the classrooms are extremely positive.

Quality of teaching in geography

The quality of teaching in geography is good.

- All lessons are well structured and planned in detail. Most have a brisk pace and sequentially build on previous learning to extend students' thinking. In the main, lessons are stimulating and engaging. Questions are widely distributed which increases student participation. Regular homework tasks support students' learning well.
- Teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) well to support their teaching and a wide range of resources is carefully selected to make lessons interesting. Plentiful opportunities are provided for challenging discussions during which students contribute ideas and develop their thinking skills. Occasionally, tasks are not matched precisely to the needs of students which results in the pace of learning slackening.
- Students speak highly of the quality of teaching and the variety of work provided for them. They are extremely positive about their experiences. One student spoke for many when she said 'I enjoy geography because the teaching is good and our lessons are interesting and fun!' Suitable opportunities are provided for students to use ICT to support their learning.
- A good range of assessment for learning strategies is employed in lessons. Self-assessment, peer-assessment plus a wide range of different activities ensure that students are actively involved in their learning. Consequently, they have an accurate understanding of how well they are doing in lessons. Good support is provided by teaching assistants.
- Work is well marked. Assessment information is used well to support students' learning. Where analysis of assessment data indicates that individual students or particular groups are at risk of underachieving, specific intervention and support are provided.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is good.

- Students study geography in Key Stage 3 in Years 7 and 8. The schemes of work fully meet national requirements. All aspects are appropriately covered and sequentially build on students' understanding and geographical thinking. Thorough lesson planning based on the schemes of work helps support the work of non-specialists.
- Topics and themes are carefully selected to provide students with a firm foundation of understanding and skills in Year 7 which is extended in breadth and depth in Year 8. Good opportunities are provided for students to develop their learning in other subjects such as English, mathematics and design and technology.
- The GCSE course is an increasingly popular option. In Year 9, students undergo an initial programme of GCSE preparation where they spend the first half of the year developing their skills. This equips them well for the rigour of study at GCSE. For the remainder of Year 9, and into Years 10 and 11, students follow the recognised GCSE syllabus. Close links with the local south-west consortium of schools ensures that provision is made for those who wish to study the subject at Advanced level.
- Opportunities to use fieldwork and real examples to motivate and inspire students are satisfactory. For example, Key Stage 3 students use the school site to study microclimates and GCSE students visit Tettenhall. Students say that they would like more opportunities to visit different localities to bring their learning to life. Although a number of other visits are undertaken by other departments, cross-curricular links are not always made to support learning in geography.
- A good range of conventional maps of different type and scale is used. School leaders recognise the need to introduce and make greater use of geographical information systems (GIS) to support the curriculum.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- The geography team and humanities department have an accurate understanding of the subject's strengths and those areas requiring improvement.
- Outcomes and provision are rigorously monitored and evaluated as part of whole-school review processes. Robust development plans have been constructed as a result of thorough and accurate departmental self-evaluation. Identified weaknesses are being addressed systematically.
- The geography department's handbook provides detailed guidance about its work. Although the department taps into support provided by the local subject network, insufficient use is made of the support provided by subject associations.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- continuing to develop and implement strategies which narrow the gap in attainment between boys and girls, and other identified groups
- developing the use of GIS to enable better analysis and interpretation of map information by students
- increasing fieldwork opportunities so that students are provided regularly with first-hand opportunities to support the curriculum and increase their geographical skills.

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 Weston
Her Majesty's Inspector