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Mr G Lonergan
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Lonergan

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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is satisfactory.

- Students enter school with standards which are below national expectations. At Key Stage 3 they develop a sound knowledge of aspects of geography, for example, flooding in Bangladesh.
- In examination classes, attainment has fluctuated in recent years and results at GCSE for 2011 dipped and were below national expectations.
- Progress is satisfactory at each Key Stage, including the sixth form, and students develop satisfactory geographical knowledge and understanding of physical and human processes. They can apply these to a range of contexts. However, their application of knowledge is hampered by a lack of fieldwork.

- Students' use and understanding of maps, geographical information systems and locational knowledge are less well developed.
- Students work both independently and collaboratively, with increasing success as they progress through the school. They follow instructions well but are reluctant to answer questions or challenge ideas.
- Students talk positively about geography. Personal development is strong and positive relationships with each other and their teachers exist. Behaviour seen in lessons was good.

Quality of teaching in geography

The quality of teaching in geography is satisfactory.

- Teaching demonstrates specialist expertise which provides students with a clear understanding of geographical knowledge and skills.
- Students report that they enjoy lessons and a good climate for learning exists. They experience a varied range of teaching and learning strategies which engages them well.
- However, learning is inconsistent across lessons as work is sometimes not matched to the students' needs. In some lessons, higher ability students are not challenged sufficiently and too few opportunities exist for independent thinking.
- Support staff provide effective support to less able students. This enables them to make similar progress as their peers. Staff know these students well and are able to tailor tasks and learning to motivate and enthuse them.
- Students are regularly encouraged to assess their own work and find ways of improving it. They reflect on their learning, but this is not always sharply focused enough to secure additional improvements to aid further progress.
- Assessments made at the end of units of study are carefully planned and targets for improvement are defined. These are shared with students and parents and carers. However, too little subsequent reference is made to these targets and they do not provide sufficient subject-specific guidance for students to progress as well as they might otherwise.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- Teachers work hard to plan lessons and units of work that impart information, build on knowledge and skills and make use of information and communication technology. Topics and themes are selected to provide students with a solid foundation of understanding and skills which is developed through Key Stage 3 and into examination classes.
- Key Stage 3 schemes of work meet national requirements and show a development of understanding and geographical thinking. Some map work

skills are woven into the units of work. Schemes of work are reviewed regularly during departmental meetings.

- Fieldwork skills are currently underdeveloped and insufficient use is made of the immediate locality. In examination classes, fieldwork linked to the controlled assessment enables students to develop their skills and understanding of tourism in the Lake District. Students comment that they would like more opportunities to visit different locations to bring learning to life.
- A range of conventional maps of differing types and scale is used. Increasing use is made of some geographical information systems, although these are not fully used to further enhance learning.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is satisfactory.

- A cohesive department supports the sharing of good practice and discussions to improve geography are developmental. Subject leadership is well motivated to seek improvement.
- The department, while having an overview of strengths, does not systematically record strengths and areas for improvement. Consequently, weaknesses are not sufficiently linked to the departmental development plan. This plan has priorities set only for the current year, but not beyond.
- Systems are in place for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the department, although these are not always sufficiently rigorous enough, as too often evaluations are supportive and celebratory rather than challenging.
- Targets are routinely set for all students and their progress towards them regularly monitored and analysed. Data analysis is supporting school leaders to identify groups who are making slower progress, and interventions are put into place to provide targeted support to address underperformance and narrow the gap in the attainment of groups.
- Subject-specific training has been limited and support provided by the subject associations has not been used to move learning on or to develop subject expertise.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing departmental leadership and management by:
 - increasing understanding of self-evaluation and making sure that this informs future developments
 - ensuring that monitoring and evaluation procedures lead to improved outcomes for students
- improving teaching and learning so that it:
 - challenges all students, particularly the most able

- develops students' core geographical knowledge especially in terms of knowing the location of places
 - develops the use of peer- and self-assessment to ensure that all students make good progress
 - provides clear guidance for students to enable them to make next steps in their learning
 - encourages more enquiry-based learning to support students to learn independently
- making use of the support and resources available from subject associations to improve learning provision and develop subject expertise.

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

Jane Millward
Her Majesty's Inspector