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Mr M Cooper
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Dear Mr Cooper

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 7 and 8 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 nine lessons, including several joint observations with you and your senior leadership team.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is satisfactory.

- Students make satisfactory progress across Key Stage 3 and reach standards which are close to the national average. They have a broad knowledge and understanding of a range of more distant localities. Their learning about the British Isles and Europe is less well developed.
- Skills, especially map work and fieldwork skills, are less well developed because students have too few opportunities in the current teaching programme to develop and practice these skills.
- Geography is a popular subject at GCSE and increasing numbers of students are opting to take it post-16. At GCSE, standards are improving

and are now close to the national average. Few students, however, attain the highest grades.

- Overall achievement post-16 is satisfactory with smaller numbers of students, who choose to complete the two-year course, often attaining high grades.
- Students, especially at Key Stage 3, have limited understanding of where places are. Geographical vocabulary is better developed in examination classes. Geographical information systems (GIS) skills are underdeveloped across all key stages.
- Students are generally over dependant on their teachers for guidance and have limited opportunities to take the initiative or show creative or original responses to their work, especially at Key Stage 3. They are genuinely interested in the subject but not always challenged. Behaviour in lessons is good.
- Outcomes for students are only satisfactory because they fail to retain sufficient information to be able to develop argument and reason, even in examination classes. This reflects shallow learning and a lack of progressive development of thinking.

Quality of teaching in geography

The quality of teaching in geography is satisfactory.

- Teachers exhibit good subject knowledge alongside good generic teaching styles and skills. Lessons are well planned and a wide range of suitable resources, including video and information and communication technology (ICT), is frequently used.
- Lessons are often task driven rather than being focused on deeper learning and enquiry. Students' knowledge and understanding can be superficial at times with insufficient opportunities to develop real thinking and challenge to stretch the most able, in particular. As a result, outcomes are only satisfactory.
- ICT is used adequately to support learning. Most often it is used to provide information through presentations. It is used less frequently to engage students in meaningful thinking and discussion. Use of GIS is noticeably absent.
- Questioning often engages an individual rather than a group of students who, when not asked directly, can relax and become passively inattentive.
- Work is marked and monitored on a regular basis and most students know their targets and what they should do to improve. However, it is less clear how teachers follow up next steps in learning or use feedback to inform their own planning. There is also some variation across classes.
- Day-to-day assessment for learning techniques are not always used effectively or appropriately. Assessment is more secure in examination classes where teachers are familiar with examination criteria.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is currently under review. There is satisfactory coverage of some key geographical concepts such as interdependence, development and sustainability. Adequate consideration is also given to physical processes and students include climate and river studies as part of their learning programme.
- The study of a wider range of places in the British Isles, including their own locality of East Yorkshire and Humberside, is more limited. Students also have few opportunities to learn about their role as citizens of Europe.
- There is broad coverage of topics but less consideration given to the progressive development of knowledge and understanding. In examination classes, syllabus coverage meets requirements.
- Limited opportunities for fieldwork are available to students in examination classes but meet basic syllabus requirements. At Key Stage 3, fieldwork is minimal and is not integrated into the teaching programme.
- The development of geographical skills, including the ability to use a range of maps with confidence, is also insecure. GIS are not used to support learning.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is satisfactory.

- The department comprises of a close knit team of dedicated subject specialists who have good subject knowledge. There is universal awareness of the need to raise standards but less clarity in how to take the next steps in doing so.
- The subject is monitored and reviewed regularly and strengths and weaknesses have been identified. However, improvement strategies are more focused on data analysis, organisation and process rather than the core issue of improving classroom practice, where satisfactory outcomes reflect satisfactory teaching.
- Subject-specific professional development has been limited to keeping abreast of examination requirements and updates such as controlled assessment guidance. The resources and support offered by the subject associations to directly improve classroom provision have not been used.
- There is a clear desire and satisfactory capacity to secure improvements. Some progress is evident with improving attainment in examinations but improvements, especially at Key Stage 3, require greater focus.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the quality of teaching and learning, especially at Key Stage 3, by:

- ensuring that tasks set provide real challenge, especially for the most able students
 - using resources, including ICT and GIS, more effectively and imaginatively to engage students
 - focusing on developing thinking and understanding alongside acquisition of information
 - using questioning more effectively to promote discussion and greater interaction between students and with teachers
 - allowing students some time to reflect and consolidate their learning and understanding
 - using fieldwork and out-of-classroom learning opportunities more effectively to bring learning to life and consolidate learning
- improving marking and assessment, especially at Key Stage 3, so that it better supports teacher planning and next steps in learning for students
 - making effective use of the support and resources provided by the subject associations to improve teacher expertise and classroom provision.

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

Leszek Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector