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Mrs K Sanderson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Sanderson

### **Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: geography**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit with Christopher Keeler HMI on 25 and 26 April 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 inadequate.

### **Achievement in geography**

Achievement in geography is inadequate.

- Attainment in geography is low. The integrated humanities course in Key Stage 3 resulted in minimal and poorly developed coverage of geography. This has had a negative impact on students' core geographical knowledge and their development of geographical skills. For example, students' knowledge of places and their ability to locate places is weak. Map work skills are also poorly developed. The lack of fieldwork for a number of years means that students lack the basic skills in collecting, presenting and analysing data to explain their findings
- Since September 2011, geography has been delivered discretely at Key Stage 3 and, as a result of focused teaching by specialist geographers, there has been some limited improvement. Learning is better developed in

Year 7 where students are benefiting from less disruption to their geographical entitlement.

- Apart from a single student in 2010, no students have sat examinations over the last three years. However, the introduction of the English Baccalaureate has raised the profile of the subject and currently 34 Year 10 students are working towards a GCSE qualification. These students are motivated, enjoy the subject and are currently making satisfactory progress despite poor experiences in Key Stage 3.
- Students' attitudes to the subject are generally positive. They see the relevance of geography and show an interest in the world around them. They are generally well behaved in lessons.

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

The quality of teaching in geography is inadequate.

- Over half of the lessons seen resulted in inadequate progress being made by the students and none were better than satisfactory.
- Lesson planning for some units of work is detailed, but at times over complex, and focused on teaching strategies and tasks rather than on learning outcomes.
- A range of quality teaching resources is available. Visual resources, especially photographs and video, are used to engage students. However, these are not always used effectively. Technology is used frequently to aid teacher exposition but students have very limited access to computers to support their learning and for geographical research. In particular, geography-specific resources such as geographical information systems (GIS) are not made available.
- There is variation across classes often as a result of tasks set not always being at an appropriate level for learners. In some classes, insufficient opportunities are provided for higher ability students to excel. In other classes, students struggle to access tasks. Pace is weak and students are often over guided to ensure that they all get the correct answers.
- Marking is regular and comments are generally diagnostic. The majority of students are clear about what they should do to improve. However, peer-assessment is not always appropriate or used effectively.
- Assessment is more secure in GCSE classes where teachers are clear about examination marking criteria. At Key Stage 3, it is inadequate because teachers are unclear about progression, what constitutes good learning over time and how to assess it appropriately.
- In examination classes, the focus of lessons on meeting examination criteria leads to students identifying with passing an examination question rather than concentrating on their learning and understanding. Lessons are often mechanistic and functional rather than inspirational and challenging.

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

The quality of the curriculum in geography is inadequate.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is currently being developed but remains incomplete. A clear attempt is being made to reverse the legacy of poor provision when geography was delivered through integrated humanities.
- New units of work are topical and have the potential to engage students. However, planning remains incomplete. Although fieldwork is being considered, this has not yet been integrated into the teaching programme. The development of map skills is limited and the use of GIS to support students' learning is also absent from the planning.
- Students have limited opportunities to learn in depth through case studies of places. There is insufficient coverage of human geography. In particular, key concepts such as interdependence and development, as well as the European dimension, are not taught in sufficient depth.
- At GCSE, a new course is being established. This ensures coverage of requirements, although students have yet to experience fieldwork entitlement.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is inadequate.

- The development of provision for GCSE geography together with the review of the Key Stage 3 curriculum reflects the school's ambition to improve provision in geography. However, self-evaluation has not identified with sufficient precision the full range of weaknesses which needs to be addressed, and teaching remains inadequate. Strategies to bring about improvement are not sufficiently well developed.
- Similarly, monitoring of provision lacks the necessary rigour and challenge to bring about rapid improvement.
- Geography-specific professional development has been limited to examination board dissemination. The resources and support of the subject associations have not been used. The sharing and development of good practice are generic rather than geography specific.

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

- ensuring that the management at all levels:
  - is clearly focused on manageable improvement strategies which are monitored rigorously
  - has clearly defined actions and timescales for improvement
  - is held accountable for improvements in learning
- ensuring that the curriculum at Key Stage 3 is completed and meets entitlement to aspects such as fieldwork, development of map skills,

including GIS, as well as concepts such as development and interdependence

- developing teaching so that it:
  - focuses on learning rather than coverage and task completion
  - fully meets students' differing needs
  - enables students to use new technology to support their learning
  - uses strategies, such as peer-assessment, when these are appropriate and liable to lead to meaningful improvement
- engaging in subject-specific professional development to support improvements. In particular, effective use should be made of the resources and support provided by the subject associations.

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**