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Miss C Edens
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Dear Miss Edens

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 on 21 and 22 May 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 five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is satisfactory.

- Students enter school with a wide range of experiences. A range of geographical knowledge, skills and understanding is studied in Key Stage 3, including 'saving planet earth', 'the weather' and 'fair trade'. Case studies are also included in the schemes of work including Brazil and Ghana.
- Attainment at GCSE has been variable over the past three years, although there was an increase in the number of students who achieved grades A* to C in 2011. However, the number of students who achieved A* or A declined in the same year. Overall attainment is broadly average.
- Current data held by the school show an improving picture. Expected levels of attainment for 2012 indicate more students are on track to

achieve A* to C. Furthermore, data at Key Stage 3 show more students achieving both the expected level and the higher level of attainment. Students are beginning to make better progress than in the past.

- New monitoring procedures, implemented by you, provide a more accurate picture of attainment and progress. Consequently, leaders are now better placed to know when students begin to fall behind. Interventions are being introduced to help these students catch up.
- The very large majority of students enjoy geography, which is reflected in their engagement in lessons and good behaviour. Students report they are given opportunities to work collaboratively and write presentations for their peers. They are able to work for sustained periods of time. A higher than average number of students opt to study geography for GCSE.

Quality of teaching in geography

The quality of teaching in geography is satisfactory.

- Students benefit from a range of activities set and enjoy debating issues of global interest. For example, a Year 7 class planned presentations in groups on the destruction of the rainforest. In a Year 9 lesson, students prepared posters showing the advantages and disadvantages of tourism. To extend their learning they were encouraged to seek solutions to identified issues.
- Teachers use a range of maps to enhance learning. Geographical information systems (GIS) are used occasionally, but the department is aware that this is an area for further development.
- Examination criteria and National Curriculum levels are used with students to enable them to answer questions with confidence. Peer-assessment is commonplace. In Key Stage 3, teachers use grade descriptors to enable students to know what they have achieved. In Key Stage 4, mark schemes are used frequently to help students understand how to answer questions effectively. However, regular marking of students' work is underdeveloped. They are not given sufficient guidance and support on how to improve their work on a day-to-day basis.
- Lessons are planned for and relate to the scheme of work. Students are assessed at the end of each unit. However, teachers are not using the information from these assessments as well as they might. This results in some activities which do not challenge students enough and a lack of targeted questions in lessons. As a consequence, some students do not make enough progress in lessons.
- A highly effective learning support assistant works in the department. She provides excellent support for all students and she knowledgeably and skilfully guides them in their learning.
- Homework activities are set to extend and support learning. Students show a genuine interest in geography and readily complete activities to enhance their progress in their own time.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- Schemes of work are well balanced so they cover most aspects of geographical learning. Suitable relevance is given to the study of places, resulting in students' awareness of the location of places, both nationally and internationally.
- Limited opportunities exist for students to undertake fieldwork. The school acknowledges more needs to be done to identify and integrate fieldwork into the curriculum plans.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum provides a sound base on which students can build and develop their learning. The curriculum at Key Stage 4 meets requirements and ensures continuity in students learning. Map work is successfully integrated into the teaching.
- The curriculum contributes well to students' good personal development. Activities provide opportunities for reflection, consolidation of learning, debate and testing of hypotheses.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is satisfactory.

- In the past, not enough was done to secure improvement in geography. However, in a very short space of time, you have developed an ambitious drive to improve outcomes for students, particularly in relation to target setting, monitoring and the quality of provision.
- Improvement planning is clear and strengths and weaknesses are known. Target setting is becoming more rigorous and challenging and students' progress is now more closely monitored. Appropriate action is taken when underachievement is identified, for example, through Saturday revision classes for Key Stage 4 students.
- A collaborative and collegiate approach has raised staff morale, following a long period of instability. Development in using assessment for learning is beginning to improve outcomes for students.
- Day-to-day monitoring of students' work is informal and supportive. It is not sufficiently challenging and does not hold the teachers to account as well as it might. Plans have recently been put in place to regularly check GCSE course work to ensure future improvements in levels of attainment.
- Leaders are generally aware of developments in geography and links with subjects associations have been used in the past. Subject-specific training, however, has been limited and only involved support from examination boards.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- reviewing day-to-day marking of students' work so that they are more aware of how to improve

- developing further opportunities to use fieldwork to enhance learning
- improving systems and procedures to monitor the effectiveness of geography at all levels
- making better use of the resources and support provided by the subject associations to improve provision and develop non-specialist subject expertise
- further developing the access to, and use of, GIS.

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