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Mrs H Jeffery  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Jeffery

### **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 15 and 16 May, accompanied by Jane Millward HMI and Deborah Jones DfE 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 in the secondary phase. There were no geography lessons available for observation in the primary phase. This report focuses principally on the secondary phase.

The overall effectiveness of geography is inadequate in both the primary and the secondary phases.

### **Achievement in geography**

Achievement in geography is inadequate.

- Attainment and progress are low in the primary phase because pupils have very limited opportunities to learn geography and no systematic development of their knowledge, skills and understanding takes place. Standards in geography are low in Key Stage 3 and at GCSE. Students, particularly the most able, are not sufficiently challenged to attain the higher grades.
- Progress across Key Stage 3 is weak. No clear teaching structure is in place, which results in students' sporadic progress in developing knowledge, skills and understanding and superficial learning.

- The poor literacy levels of some students hamper progress. Students have few opportunities to practise and develop their writing skills through extended pieces of work. Geographical vocabulary is not consistently developed and the use of inappropriate terminology is rarely corrected.
- At GCSE, a majority of students make satisfactory progress. However, the focus in these lessons is on guiding students to pass the examination, with an over-reliance on teachers giving the correct answer, rather than developing students' cognitive ability and geographical skills.
- Students' geographical knowledge and skills are weak. Very few students are able to locate the places they have studied with any degree of accuracy. Their knowledge of places and what these are like is poorly developed, as are their map work and fieldwork skills.
- Despite these issues, students generally enjoy the subject and have a keen interest in the world around them.

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

The quality of teaching in geography is inadequate.

- In the primary phase, the lack of adequate resources to teach geography or understanding of what constitutes good teaching or assessment in the subject adversely affects provision in the classroom.
- Teaching focuses heavily on guidance from teachers which often slows the pace of lessons at Key Stage 3, where lessons are driven by completing tasks. Students are often asked to engage in a sequence of activities which, at times, is inappropriate and insufficiently challenging, particularly for the higher ability students.
- Where teacher input is overlong, students are passive and become dependent on the teacher providing the answer, leading them to comment that they often found the subject relatively easy. Questioning is frequently too controlled and does not encourage interaction and discussion. Students are not encouraged to think independently or provided with sufficient opportunities to reflect on their learning.
- Teaching is more effective at Key Stage 4 where the lessons are clearly structured and the need to cover the syllabus ensures a satisfactory pace.
- A good range of resources is available, including topical multimedia resources which initially engage students' interest. However, these are not always used effectively to elicit better and higher-level responses from students.
- Relationships in lessons are good and students are well managed. They have positive attitudes but their aspirations are not supported adequately to enable them to reach their potential.
- Work is marked regularly and students are generally provided with diagnostic feedback which raises their awareness of what they need to do to improve.
- An inappropriate use of a mix of assessments at Key Stage 3 leads to formal assessments which are often inaccurate. As a result, students'

achievement is over-inflated. Assessment is more secure at GCSE where the use of examination criteria in lessons results in more confident judgements about progress.

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

The quality of the curriculum in geography is inadequate.

- No cohesive geography curriculum exists in the primary phase. The curriculum at Key Stage 3 does not meet current requirements. It is fragmented with no scheme of work in place to support the progressive development of geographical knowledge, skills and understanding. Students have no opportunities at Key Stage 3 to collect and interpret data and little emphasis is placed on developing map work skills.
- There is an imbalance and over-emphasis on environmental issues and sustainability and too little focus on understanding of place. Little coverage is given to the British Isles or Europe which leaves a large vacuum in students' geographical learning. As a result, conceptual ideas and issues lack relevance to their own lives.
- Fieldwork skills are not taught at Key Stage 3, although at GCSE basic requirements are met. The use of geographical information systems (GIS) to support learning is not in evidence.
- The curriculum does not support the development of literacy skills because the emphasis is on low-level responses and few opportunities are provided for extended writing. The development of geographical vocabulary, although encouraged, is not effectively promoted by the teaching.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is inadequate.

- Although leadership is aware of some of the current developments in the subject and has made use of geography-specific training provided by the subject associations, this has not been translated into improvements in either the curriculum or the teaching. For example, training has occurred in GIS and fieldwork, but neither of these aspects has been developed within the teaching programme other than at examination level.
- Geography has a very low profile in the primary phase and has not been the focus of any development. No-one is responsible for managing the subject.
- Management has raised the profile of the subject in the secondary phase and students have started to opt to take geography at examination level over the last few years. However, limited specialist staffing discourages more from opting into GCSE.
- Monitoring of provision has not been accurate or rigorous enough to support improvement. Self-evaluation has been over-optimistic and provides an inaccurate picture of provision. Where weaknesses have been identified, no strategic planning has taken place to support improvement. The focus of any improvement planning is on systems such as updating

the marking and assessment policy or the purchase of resources, rather than the development of pedagogy in the classroom or more effective use of resources.

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

- ensuring an appropriate curriculum is put in place in Key Stage 3 and the primary phase to:
  - provide a cohesive framework to support the teaching of the subject, especially in the primary phase where there is no geography specific expertise
  - ensure that requirements to teach fieldwork and map skills are met as well as the use of GIS in the secondary phase
  - support the progressive development of knowledge, skills and understanding in the subject
- improving the quality of teaching so that more is at least consistently good by:
  - providing students with more frequent opportunities to learn independently
  - developing questioning to encourage greater interaction and debate
  - making more effective and appropriate use of good multimedia resources to enable students to develop their thinking and understanding
  - ensuring that tasks set provide an appropriate level of challenge, particularly for the most able
  - ensuring that assessment is appropriate and accurate and supports teacher planning
- using the support and resources provided by the subject associations to develop effective pedagogy and provision in the classroom.

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**