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Mrs L Porter
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Dear Mrs Porter

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 18 and 19 June 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.

- Attainment in geography is steadily increasing and shows an improving trend over time. In the past, attainment and progress have not been good enough, resulting in significant underperformance. However, in 2011 attainment was much closer to the national average. Internal data held by the school indicates that improvements are expected to continue. This applies both to students in Key Stage 3 and those studying GCSE.
- The school recognises that geography has been an underperforming subject in recent years. Improvements can now be seen and there is evidence to show that the school is closing the gap in levels of attainment for different groups. Students known to be eligible for free school meals are now achieving more in line with their peers.

- Students can work collaboratively and independently and can give reasons for judgements. They can devise hypotheses and develop reasoned arguments based on secure knowledge and understanding. However, their locational knowledge is less well developed. This is because map work skills are not systematically planned for.
- There is genuine enjoyment of geographical study in school. Relationships in classrooms are positive. A secure learning environment is evident and students have a keen interest in learning about the world around them.

Quality of teaching in geography

The quality of teaching in geography is satisfactory.

- Teaching is variable across the school which mirrors the school's own view of the quality of provision. Teachers have good subject knowledge and enjoy teaching a range of geographical concepts.
- Lessons follow a clear sequence for learning. Short activities which link together guide learning. This is well scaffolded by the teacher. A range of teaching strategies is employed by teachers.
- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) is developed by teachers to aid exposition and dissemination. Students have fewer opportunities to use ICT for their own learning. Some limited use of geographical information systems (GIS) is made, although this is not well embedded into the teaching programme.
- Marking of students' work is inconsistent. In some cases, it supports students in knowing how to improve their learning, as well as celebrating successes. In other instances, however, it simply affirms the efforts of students and some work remains unmarked.
- Teachers generally make effective use of 'HOT' (Higher Order Thinking) questions to extend the more able students. Students report that they enjoy geography lessons, although in some cases activities are not always as carefully matched to the needs of all learners as well as they might.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- The curriculum includes human and physical geographical themes as well as the discrete study of places. Schemes of work are in place for each unit of work. However, in Key Stage 3 these are not underpinned by a programme of development of subject skills or geographical concepts.
- Opportunities to develop outdoor learning through fieldwork are limited. Currently, fieldwork is not identified or integrated into curriculum plans.
- The curriculum contributes well to good personal development. Generally, students' behaviour is good and cooperation and collaboration are evident to support learning.

- Examination specifications for GCSE are met and students' needs are considered through the use of a range of teaching strategies. Case studies are developed to support students' understanding. Examination criteria are used to guide students in how to reach their target grade.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is satisfactory.

- Senior leaders have a clear vision to improve outcomes for all students in geography. They have focused on improving the quality of provision and provided training opportunities to develop aspects of teaching and learning. As a result, rates of progress are beginning to improve.
- A clear cycle of monitoring and evaluation is in place for geography. This includes line management meetings which focus on students' achievement, lesson observations, work scrutiny, learning walks and the use of student voice.
- A geography action plan has been implemented and the school knows its strengths and weaknesses. However, while the department's action plan identifies appropriate priorities, the tasks and evaluations are not as rigorous as they might because some targets lack precision.
- Self-evaluation by senior leaders is accurate. Students' progress in geography is now carefully monitored and target setting is more readily shared with students. As a result they are aware of the National Curriculum levels which they are achieving.
- Use is made of subject associations and a local cluster of schools support each other with developments in geography.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving management by:
 - developing planning for future improvements and ensuring that these are informed by accurate subject-specific self-evaluation and linked to positive outcomes for students
 - improving schemes of work to accurately reflect a progression of geographical knowledge, skills and understanding
- improving the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - ensuring that activities are carefully matched to the needs of all students
 - developing the marking of students' work, so that they know how to improve
- developing fieldwork and the use of GIS to provide quality practical experiences which support learning.

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