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Mr A Mitchell  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Mitchell

### **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 3 and 4 July 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 good.

#### **Achievement in geography**

Achievement in geography is good.

- GCSE results have been above average for the last three years. The proportion of students attaining A\* to C grades in each year, however, has been falling. The appointment of a new head of department and teaching staff has reversed this and, with half the results already known, school data indicate a significant improvement this year.
- The progress of students sitting the GCSE examination has been variable but never less than above expectation and occasionally good; current Year 11 students are expected to make at least good progress.
- At A level, numbers have historically been low and students have generally met national expectations and their targets. The current Year 13 students are likely to exceed their targets.

- This year nearly all students met the end of Key Stage 3 national expectations with almost three quarters attaining higher levels. This is an improvement on the previous year.
- Many students have very good core geographical knowledge, including the accurate use of vocabulary and place location. They have a good understanding of how places are linked and can be affected by physical and human processes. They are interested in the world around them and, in particular, in contemporary events. Knowledge and understanding develop well as students progress through the school.
- Students hold geography in high esteem and value the subject and commitment of the teachers. This results in outstanding behaviour as demonstrated by their very positive attitudes to learning, respect for peers and staff, and pride in their work.

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

The quality of teaching in geography is good.

- The quality of teaching is never less than good and an increasing proportion is outstanding. The outstanding aspects of teaching include teachers' application of up-to-date subject knowledge and their suitably high expectations of students, which is evident in the increasing challenge present in lessons.
- Teachers are passionate about geography and this is reflected in the high level of enjoyment in lessons observed and reported by the students.
- Good use is made of a range of appropriate strategies that fully engages students in their learning. However, students do not have enough opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning.
- Teachers' questioning is well targeted and is used effectively to check and develop students' understanding; their progress is monitored well in lessons.
- Teachers use high-quality resources, including the interactive whiteboard, effectively to support learning. Opportunities for students to use information and communication technology (ICT), including geographic information systems, are limited.
- Assessment is a strength of the department. All students are aware of their targets and what they need to do to improve.
- The regular formal assessment programme uses a range of approaches which allows students to demonstrate what they know and understand. Students are provided with the assessment criteria and receive detailed feedback on their responses.
- The marking of classwork and homework is frequent with useful comments and points for improvement noted.

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

The quality of the curriculum in geography is good.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum provides students with a broad and balanced experience of geography. There is a good focus on physical and human geography alongside the development of skills and place knowledge. Some contemporary units, such as the geography of conflict, are much appreciated by the students.
- Schemes of work are in place for each unit of work and most identify the key concepts and processes to be taught. However, the coverage and progressive development of these across the key stage are not explicitly planned.
- The GCSE and A-level courses have been carefully selected to meet the students' needs and the improving outcomes demonstrate that this is effective.
- Fieldwork experiences, mainly using the school grounds, are identified in Key Stage 3 planning and arrangements have been put in place to extend this next year. A more comprehensive programme is in place to support GCSE and A-level courses.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- The new head of department, in a short period of time, has had a significant impact resulting in improved examination results; an increase in the number opting to study examination courses; and better quality teaching. Students reported how much they have enjoyed geography this year. As a result, capacity to improve is outstanding.
- Subject review and improvement planning focus on the key issues of raising attainment through improving provision. Plans are in place to build on key aspects of provision.
- The staff work very effectively as a team and share a common purpose to provide a high-quality geography education.
- Monitoring is robust and the outcomes are being used to plan future developments. Student voice has a strong place in the review process.
- Subject-specific professional development is being used well to support the improvement process.
- The geography classrooms are vibrant and the displays support teachers' high expectations and drive to improve performance.
- The profile of geography in the school is increasing.

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

- providing students with more opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning, especially in Key Stage 3, to develop their independent learning skills
- reviewing the Key Stage 3 curriculum to:

- ensure that all the key concepts and processes, including fieldwork and ICT, are covered and developed progressively across the three years
- allow for greater flexibility and relevance in the choice of content to be taught.

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

**Paul Dowgill**  
**Additional Inspector**