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Mr B Loughran
Principal
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Dear Mr Loughran

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 9 and 10 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 five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is satisfactory.

- Students make satisfactory progress in learning about physical and human environments at a local, national and global scale. They acquire a good range of key geographical terminology relating to the themes studied, which they use accurately in response to teachers' questioning.
- Students gain a sound understanding of current geographical issues and the ways in which different places are interdependent at a global scale. For example, Year 8 students considered the moral significance of 'Fair Trade' when learning about inequalities between different communities. However, their understanding of how physical and human environments are interrelated is less well developed.
- At times, students' progress in lessons is too dependent on the guidance provided by their teacher and opportunities are missed to extend their

geographical skills and knowledge through a more enquiry-based approach to learning.

- Students are generally positive in their behaviour and attitudes towards learning in geography. However, on occasion, their interest wanes where activities do not capture their interest and they become passive. The increasing number of students opting to take the subject at Key Stage 4 reflects a growing interest in the subject since the academy opened.

Quality of teaching in geography

The quality of teaching in geography is satisfactory.

- Teaching is planned thoroughly and activities are sequenced carefully to meet intended learning outcomes. However, assessment information is not used consistently to adapt tasks so that all students are suitably challenged or supported to achieve as well as they might.
- The most effective teaching is characterised by good subject knowledge and enthusiastic delivery of themes and concepts. Students engage well in challenging activities that promote active participation and opportunities for independent learning. For example, Year 7 students reflected well on photographs of people affected by the tsunami in Japan in 2011. Their individual perceptions of the experiences of different people both during and after the event were used effectively as a stimulus to prepare group presentations about the cause and effects of this natural disaster.
- At times, students are over-directed and too little time is allocated for them to participate in active geographical investigation. While opportunities are provided for students to develop geographical skills, for example in fieldwork, these are not embedded within teaching so that their skills are built on progressively over time.
- Opportunities are missed to capitalise on a good range of resources that is used to support learning, including multimedia. This is partly because insufficient time is allocated for students to interact with the resources fully to deepen and extend their learning.
- Students receive helpful verbal and written feedback that identifies what they have achieved and next steps to support their learning. However, students do not routinely act on the advice provided to improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- The geography curriculum includes a suitable balance of themes and key geographical concepts with relevant case studies that reflect current issues affecting human and physical environments. For example, students spoke enthusiastically about their study of the recent floods that affected Darwin following heavy rainfall. A good emphasis is also placed on promoting students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

- While the curriculum provides regular opportunities to develop different geographical skills, including fieldwork, these are not built on progressively over time to maximise their impact on students' learning, particularly at Key Stage 3.
- A mixed-year GCSE group, including students in Years 9, 10 and 11, has ensured that geography has been available as a one-year curriculum option at Key Stage 4 since the academy opened in 2008. The decision to allocate additional time to study GCSE over two years from September 2012 has the potential to extend opportunities to develop geographical skills and knowledge in greater depth.
- The geography curriculum is adapted suitably to support whole-school initiatives in literacy, including the development of students' extended writing and oracy skills. Cross-curricular links are also strengthening across the humanities subjects and becoming established with other areas including English, modern foreign languages and technology.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is satisfactory.

- The subject is led by an enthusiastic and committed leader who has worked effectively with the director for learning in humanities to raise the subject's profile within the academy.
- Planning is shared between specialist and non-specialist teachers and provision is improving as a result of a team approach within the humanities faculty. However, opportunities for subject-specific professional development are limited as suitable and relevant courses have not been identified.
- The quality of provision is monitored and evaluated regularly by leaders as part of whole-academy self-review procedures. A range of data is used to evaluate progress made by individual students and to achieve a broad overview of achievement and attainment in geography. However, leaders have not established interim milestone targets by which to check students' progress and inform planning in the short and medium term, particularly at Key Stage 3.
- Leaders are taking advantage of opportunities to increase outdoor learning and to extend the contribution of geography across the curriculum, for example, through the academy's specialism in entrepreneurship. At the time of the inspection, students were preparing for an end-of-term event about 'eco-business'.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising achievement in geography by:
 - ensuring that lesson planning is tailored to meet the needs of all groups of students

- increasing students' independence in learning, for example through a more enquiry-based approach to geographical issues
- reviewing schemes of work to ensure progression in developing students' geographical skills and knowledge
- identifying interim milestone checks by which to measure students' progress in the short and medium term, particularly at Key Stage 3
- taking advantage of opportunities to share good practice in geography teaching within the academy and through links with other providers and 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.

Yours sincerely

Sara Morrissey
Her Majesty's Inspector