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Mrs Sarah Godden
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Dear Mrs Godden

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 27 and 28 September to look at work in geography.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the global dimension 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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are outstanding.

- Key Stage 3 standards are well above average; students explain geographical patterns and processes particularly well. GCSE and post-16 examination results are also above average and students' coursework is of high quality.
- Behaviour was excellent, reflecting teachers' high expectations. Students show high motivation and interest in geography and develop

their literacy and ICT skills well through the subject. Students at all levels show good study skills.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in geography is outstanding.

- Lessons were stimulating. Excellent use was made of video projection, ICT and active learning strategies. There were plentiful opportunities for challenging discussions during which students contributed ideas and developed their thinking skills.
- Lessons were very well structured. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and focused on ensuring that students achieve accurate and thorough geographical learning. They continually checked students' understanding and, when necessary, responded quickly and flexibly to support or extend learning.
- Assessment is accurate. Coursework assessments in Key Stage 3 are carefully planned to assess each geography strand. Marking is precise and teachers give students good guidance on how to improve. Students are active partners in setting targets and they reflect on the outcomes of assessment units.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

- Topics and themes are carefully selected at Key Stage 3 to provide students with a firm foundation of understanding and skills in Year 7 which is extended in breadth and depth in subsequent years.
- The geography scheme is continually developing, for example recently to include ICT, thinking strategies and topics such as global football. A geology 'taster' unit is included in Year 9.
- Good attention is paid to literacy. Written work shows a variety of extended writing tasks, using different text forms and presenting reports from different viewpoints.
- There is a field work programme, but fieldwork does not occur in all three years at Key Stage 3. A Milan visit for Year 11 geographers provides them with real case study experience.

Leadership and management of the subject

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- The excellent geography team is very well managed and teachers all work to their strengths. They are willing to adopt new initiatives and made these work effectively. There are clear policies to steer the department and resources are used well. However, there are no links with feeder primary schools.

- The department has very good capacity for ongoing improvement. Professional development opportunities are used well. Geography is a popular and successful subject in the school.
- There is an annual departmental development plan, but no formal regular departmental review.
- Student data is collected, but it is not sufficiently analysed to identify trends, indicate differences in the performance of groups or seek reasons for subject uptake year by year.

Subject issue: the global dimension

Students' learning about the global dimension is good.

- The curriculum provides good coverage of global topics and encourages students to make local/global links and evaluate their own values.
- Students understand their responsibilities as global citizens. Valuing diversity and combating discrimination are not ignored, but do not have a high profile.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is good.

- Improved whole-school arrangements for students with special educational needs have ensured that geography staff plan for individual needs.
- A feature of the high quality teaching was that staff continually check students' progress and respond with support when needed to ensure all are included and engaged in learning.

Areas for improvement

We discussed areas for development that the school and department may wish to consider, including:

- the introduction of formal systems for regular departmental review and a detailed analysis of student outcomes
- ways to provide more opportunities for Key Stage 3 students to develop their fieldwork skills
- how best to explore issues surrounding the primary-secondary transition in geography and establishing a baseline assessment when students join the school.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop geography in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Andrea Tapsfield
Her Majesty's Inspector