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Dear Mr Loach

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 11-12 October to look at work in geography.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject/aspect, 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 six lessons.

Overall the effectiveness of geography was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Key Stage 3 standards are close to the national average, with slightly fewer students achieving higher levels. However, students' progress in the lessons observed was good and their responses to extended writing tasks often showed good reasoning and explanation.
- At GCSE, students' standards are below the national average, although broadly similar to their achievements in their other subjects. Students

do not make the same progress in geography during Key Stage 4 as they do at Key Stage 3. Progress was satisfactory in the Year 10 and 11 lessons observed.

- Students' behaviour was excellent, reflecting teachers' high expectations. Students engage well with learning tasks and show high motivation and interest in the subject.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in geography is good.

- Teaching is confident and draws on the teachers' very good subject knowledge. Lessons are well structured and engage learners well in learning tasks.
- Lessons begin with imaginative activities that motivate students very well from the start. A good range of teaching strategies is used although opportunities are not always taken to use discussion and student talk to achieve learning of the highest quality.
- Assessment units are used very effectively in Key Stage 3 to assess attainment accurately. However, the lack of a geography baseline on entry into Year 7 makes monitoring of progress less secure.
- Students show a very good understanding of how to achieve higher levels. Teachers give students good feedback on their work with guidance on how to improve.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum has a diverse range of themes which enthuse students. It is continually developing, for example to introduce thinking skills and new topics such as global fashion. It is supported with good, up-to-date resources.
- Good attention is paid to literacy and ICT. Detailed audits have been undertaken, for example to show how geography contributes to citizenship and enterprise.
- Less emphasis is given to fieldwork skills and techniques and environmental issues than to places and geographical patterns and processes.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- The department is well organised and the staff work well as a team. They have adopted new initiatives to better meet student needs, such as diversifying into Leisure and Tourism and changing the GCSE syllabus.

- Staff listen to, and act on, feedback, for example from the department review and pupil questionnaires. To date there has been little consideration given to pupils' prior geography experiences.
- The teaching rooms provide a good geography learning environment, including displays that show levelled work and ways to raise achievement.
- The department has good systems for student self-review, target setting and progress tracking. However, the analysis of student outcomes tends to focus on individual performance and does not do enough to identify possible underlying causes for some underachievement, particularly at Key Stage 4.

Subject issue: the global dimension

Students' learning about the global dimension is good.

- The curriculum provides good coverage of global topics and pays good attention to aspects such as the rights and responsibilities of global citizens.
- There are good opportunities for students to make local/global links, for example in a Year 7 lesson where students explored the meaning of 'interdependence' through considering their food and possessions.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is satisfactory.

- Detailed records are held of students' special needs and the department has provided opportunities for gifted and talented students to participate in extra-curricular events in the local area.
- Teaching staff check carefully on students' understanding and progress in lessons, although teaching assistants are not used effectively enough.
- In September mixed ability teaching was introduced in Years 8, 9 and 11. There has been insufficient planning and preparation to ensure this is implemented successfully.

Areas for improvement

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include the need to:

- raise achievement at Key Stage 4 and increase the proportion of students attaining Level 6 at the end of Key Stage 3
- review teaching strategies and the curriculum for mixed ability classes
- seek ways to provide more opportunities for students to develop their fieldwork skills and their environmental understanding

- explore the previous geography experience of Year 7 students and establish their starting points when they 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