

16 October 2006

Mrs J Winwood - Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Winwood

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 4-5 October 2006 to look at work in geography.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of geography, the visit had a particular focus on the global dimension.

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 pupils' and students' work and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography was judged to be good with some outstanding features.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good with some outstanding features.

- Standards in Key Stages 3 and 4 are exceptionally high and have improved steadily over the last three years. Standards at Advanced level are well above average.
- Pupils' progress in Key Stage 3 is excellent as shown by their high attainment and detailed in-depth studies. Progress in Key Stage 4 is

good and students are very well prepared for examinations. There are few opportunities for pupils to demonstrate achievement outside the constraints of the examination syllabus. Progress at Advanced level is often good but is inconsistent.

- Personal development and well being are outstanding. Students' attitudes and behaviour are almost always excellent. They are highly motivated and keen to learn.
- Pupils enjoy geography because of the interesting curriculum content and the wide range of activities provided. Pupils particularly enjoy the active involvement in their learning experience in geography.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning overall are good with some outstanding features.

- Good teaching was characterised by a wide range of activities which quickly engaged and involved all pupils, enabling them to make good progress. Not all pupils were fully stretched and challenged when teaching was mainly teacher directed.
- Outstanding teaching generated high levels of enthusiasm and enabled all pupils to make good progress. Some made excellent progress because the activities were very well matched to pupils' abilities and supportive interventions by the teacher were highly effective.
- Assessment is excellent. Pupils in all years are clear about how well they are doing and what they have to do to improve. Teaching plans are effectively informed by prior assessment information.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- Pupils in Key Stage 3 have good opportunities to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding in considerable depth.
- Key Stage 4 curriculum activities focus very effectively on preparing the pupils for examination success. There are few opportunities for extended, in-depth studies which would better meet the needs of some pupils.
- There is a good fieldwork programme which pupils enjoy and which effectively enhances their geographical understanding of a range of physical and human topics.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good overall.

- The subject is extremely well organised with extensive and detailed schemes of work and a wide range of resources. Much of the

department's work is accessible to pupils and parents through a highly effective internet web site.

- The recently appointed subject leader has a good grasp of the subject's key strengths and weaknesses. She sees clear opportunities for a range of improvements to build on the existing strong performance.
- The capacity for improvement is good, demonstrated by improvements in standards in recent years, accurate self evaluation and well developed lines of accountability for pupil performance.
- The subject is a popular choice at both GCSE and Advanced level. There is much greater proportion of pupils opting for geography GCSE than nationally.

Subject issue: the global dimension

Pupils' learning about the global dimension is good.

- The curriculum and extra curricular activities such as the department's forthcoming trip to Iceland ensure the pupils understand their place in the world. They are better able to understand a range of local, national and international issues as a result of their studies in geography. Pupils' understanding of the links between physical and human systems is well developed.
- The subject is part of the schools' application for International School status.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is good.

- Almost all pupils meet or exceed challenging targets and there is very little underachievement.
- High quality relationships between staff and pupils are effectively developed and underpin much of the good teaching.
- The Key Stage 4 curriculum does not always fully cater for the needs of pupils who are gifted in terms of their geographical ability.

Areas for improvement

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

- ensure the Key Stage 4 curriculum enables pupils to explore and develop their geographical knowledge and understanding in greater depth alongside preparing pupils for examination success
- develop curriculum activities which better meet the needs of pupils who have a flair and aptitude for geography, particularly in Key Stage 4

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

Tom Winskill
Her Majesty's Inspector