

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045  
F 020 7421 6644  
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs A Beer  
Headteacher  
Worthing High School  
South Farm Rd  
Worthing  
W Sussex  
BN14 7AR

Dear Mrs Beer

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 18-19 September 2006 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 emphasis placed on the global dimension of the subject.

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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography was judged to be satisfactory, with a number of good features.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall.

- By the end of Key Stage 3 students achieve in line with national expectation.
- A number of students have low levels of literacy on entry to the school. It is important for the geography teachers to keep in mind the need to support this in order to raise standards.

- Results at GCSE have shown a marked upward trend, however, there are still too few very high GCSE grades.
- Students generally behave well and enthusiastically in lessons, responding positively to their teachers.

### Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching was satisfactory with some good features.

- Students are learning significant new knowledge and make satisfactory progress from Year 8 to Year 11.
- Planning for lessons reflects aspects of the secondary strategy; starters and plenaries are planned for and appropriate learning objectives stated.
- Good quality teacher explanation was apparent in lessons, although there was too much teacher input.
- Students need greater opportunity to reflect on their work and design their own enquiries. Enquiry based learning is underdeveloped.
- Good assessment strategies have been developed within the humanities faculty including geography, and are being used as a model of good practice across the school. However, students need further structured guidance on assessing their own and their peers' work.
- Very effective use is made of modern information technology, including the use of interactive white boards. Practice is currently being shared between teachers in the geography department, which is to be encouraged.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory overall.

- Effective schemes of work were newly drawn up for Year 8. Those for Year 9 are undergoing change to reduce the amount of topic overlap, especially in coastal work and weather and climate. These need to be further adapted to meet the range of needs of different students.
- There is over reliance on the use of a limited range of textbooks.
- Students reported that they enjoyed their geography especially on the occasions when they had opportunities to interact in small groups and they valued clear teacher exposition. They see the subject as relevant to their lives.
- An excellent unit of work, which reflects particularly appropriate styles of learning, has been produced in conjunction with another school on the geography of bird flu. This provides a very good model for developing other units of work in the Year 8 and Year 9 curriculum.
- Good opportunities exist for day and residential fieldwork, which students greatly appreciate. However, these need to reflect more opportunities for active learning and the higher order thinking skills of analysis and evaluation.

## Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are satisfactory.

- Considerable progress has been made in the last two years, developing both the geography department and the humanities faculty.
- Appropriate targets have been set for the department in its action plan.
- The head of department has a clear view of where standards should be raised still further.
- There is strong and effective line management of the geography department and a range of monitoring activities, which enable appropriate evaluation to take place.
- Good commitment exists to developing the work of the department and in undertaking continuing professional development.

## Subject issue

Students' learning about the global dimension is satisfactory.

- Effective use is made within the schemes of work to reflect the global dimension, interdependence and sustainability.

## Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is satisfactory overall.

- Students are setted for geography in broad based sets; the most able students achieve less than their potential because they are not sufficiently challenged or encouraged to think independently.
- Students from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve well.

## Areas for improvement

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

- develop further the units of work to reflect a greater degree of enquiry based learning in both class work and fieldwork
- continue with the development and refinement of assessment strategies, including sharpening the focus of student peer assessment, enabling it to become a real spur to raising standards still further
- ensure that all students are suitably challenged.

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

Jennifer Smith  
Her Majesty's Inspector