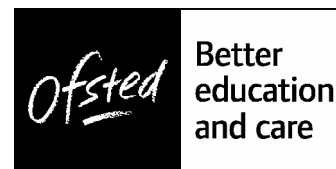


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Ms Brandreth
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Dear Ms Brandreth

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography and design and technology

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during our visit on 05 and 06 March to look at work in geography and design and technology.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subjects, the geography visit had a particular focus on the global dimension and the design and technology visit had a particular focus on social inclusion and the achievement of boys.

The visits 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 lessons at each Key Stage.

Geography

The overall effectiveness of geography was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall.

- Achievement and standards are satisfactory in Key Stage 3 and pupils reach nationally expected standards. Most of their progress is made

during Year 9 in response to specialist geography teaching. By the end of Key Stage 4 standards are above average and achievement is good. Many pupils are exceeding their appropriate targets as a result of very good teaching.

- Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make excellent progress as a result of very effective support from teaching assistants and teachers.
- Pupils' locational knowledge is less well developed than other aspects of their geography due to a lack of focus on particular places and the limited use of atlases during lessons.
- Pupils' attitudes to geography are very positive. They value the support that staff provide. Attendance is good and punctuality excellent.
- Pupils' personal development is satisfactory overall with good opportunities for them to work both in pairs and groups as well as independently.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in geography is satisfactory overall but good where teachers are geography specialists.

- Specialist teachers have excellent subject knowledge and their marking shows pupils how to improve their geography. Non-specialists are not sufficiently aware of pupils' common misconceptions to anticipate and correct all their errors.
- Teachers' planning is at least satisfactory. Specialist geography teachers plan effective lessons especially where well written, subject specific, achievable learning outcomes are shared with pupils.
- Teaching in Key Stage 4 is too teacher led so that pupils do not take sufficient responsibility for their own learning.
- Teachers are using an increasingly wide range of teaching and learning strategies in response to the National Strategy initiatives and pupils appreciate this.
- Although teachers are making increasing use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), it is not yet widely used to support pupils' learning. Opportunities for enquiry and independent learning are also limited. When these are provided, pupils respond positively.
- Teachers use a satisfactory range of resources in their teaching. The range is enhanced by electronic links to internet resources and the use of materials designed to develop pupils' thinking skills. There is insufficient use made of atlases and photographs. Limited reference is also made to pupils' own experiences that should enrich their learning.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is inadequate.

- The curriculum is inadequate because it does not meet statutory requirements for fieldwork. It is too focused on content and provides little opportunity to promote creativity. There is insufficient flexibility to address topical issues.
- The curriculum in Key Stage 3 puts too much emphasis on physical processes and too little emphasis on human processes and the interactions between landscapes and the people who live there.
- The Key Stage 4 curriculum meets the needs of examination requirements well.
- The schemes of work do not give enough emphasis to progression in skills and concepts. They do not show opportunities to personalise the learning for lower and higher attaining pupils or to make links with literacy, numeracy and ICT that would better support pupils' learning.
- The schemes of work do not include sufficient references to a wide range of varied places. Opportunities are missed to promote high quality race relations or help pupils' cultural development.

Leadership and management of the subject

Leadership and management of geography are satisfactory.

- There is good capacity for improvement. The learning leader has a good awareness of key development priorities despite the lack of rigorous systems for monitoring and evaluation.
- Development planning is not sufficiently focused on subject priorities since it does not arise from a strong evidence base.
- Team meetings provide good support for non-specialist teachers but there are few formal opportunities to share good practice.
- The management of assessment is satisfactory. There is growing awareness of the importance of target setting generally and the use of national curriculum levels in Key Stage 3. However, pupils are confused by the range of systems.
- Assessment data is not being sufficiently analysed to identify potential discrepancies in achievement between groups of learners or ensure that all pupils are doing as well as they should.

Subject issue: the global dimension

Pupils' learning about the global dimension is satisfactory.

- The school is twinned with a school in South Africa and works with global charities. Although these initiatives are well designed to promote

the global dimension within school, they are small scale as yet and the majority of pupils lack awareness of them.

- The newly restructured 'Every Child Matters' area of the curriculum has a good focus on Fair Trade and the work of OXFAM which should support pupils' understanding. However, the lack of curriculum focus on pupils' own experiences makes it difficult for them to fully appreciate how local actions can have global consequences.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is good.

- Pupils get good personal support from their teachers and appreciate the help and encouragement given.
- There is no evidence that any groups of pupils achieve significantly differently from others. However, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities progress particularly well in lessons as a result of additional support from skilled teaching assistants.

Areas for improvement

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

- improve the achievement of pupils, especially in Years 7 and 8
- provide subject support to help non-specialist teachers improve their teaching of geography
- ensure that the curriculum meets statutory requirements for fieldwork
- develop the curriculum to better meet learners' needs and improve opportunities for progression
- improve the use of assessment data in the monitoring of achievement
- ensure that development planning is informed by a wide range of quality assurance evidence.

Design and Technology

Provision for Design & Technology is good and it has the potential for continuing improvement.

Achievements and Standards

Achievement and standards were good in the lessons seen. GCSE results were at around the national average in 2006 after several years of being below average. As a result, achievement and standards are judged to be satisfactory overall.

- The improved GCSE results in 2006 reflect a concerted effort by staff and this effort is continuing as the department strives to raise attainment further.
- Students in the top sets in Years 8 and 9 were seen making excellent progress and responding well to the challenging teaching.
- The department is successful in stimulating pupils to design creatively whilst ensuring the challenges set for them match their abilities.
- Boys are considerably outperformed by girls in the GCSE examinations.

Quality of Teaching and Learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- The teachers work very well as a co-operative team. Each has good, relevant subject expertise and the ability to enthuse students.
- Teachers strive to make students think and this is accepted by students and welcomed by those spoken to. Effective attempts are made to stimulate visual and functional design thinking.
- A small number of older pupils do not listen attentively enough to the classroom demonstrations.
- Theory and practice are well integrated in the Key Stage 3 projects. In Key Stage 4 practice varies between focus areas.
- Course booklets are rich in content and variety of activities and they provide clear guidance to students.
- Course planning, schemes of work and lesson organisation are very thorough and they support the good curriculum which has been developed.
- Resourcing is modest though what is available is well used. There are deficiencies in provision for systems and control in Key Stage 3 and, more widely, in computer aided designing and manufacturing (CAD/CAM) throughout the school. This deprives students of the opportunities found in many schools to experience aspects of 'hi tec' D&T.
- Assessment is well developed throughout the department. Staff have a very good overview of the progress made by students and set challenging targets. Students are clear about their standards and appreciate the lengths staff go to to help them to develop.

Quality of the Curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- D&T is well timetabled.
- The Key Stage 3 'carousel' timetable works effectively because staff are aware, through good assessment and record keeping, of the prior attainments of students and strive to challenge them to do their best in specialist projects.

- The curriculum is well organised around a range of modern and intrinsically interesting projects.
- The whole of the complex curriculum of D&T is well covered except for those areas noted above which are inadequately resourced.
- D&T courses make strong reference to manufacturing industry. Vocational subjects are not currently taught, though the school is reviewing this situation.

Leadership and Management

The subject is well led and managed.

- D&T is well supported by the school's senior staff.
- The department is very effectively led and managed and the focus is very appropriately on improving learning.
- The comprehensive handbook gives good guidance to staff.
- The department runs efficiently and staff are very vigilant in securing the safety and sensible behaviour of students.

Inclusion

The subject's contribution to inclusion is good.

- Differentiated teaching is effective, partly though setting in Years 8 and 9 and largely to the efforts staff make to challenge individuals to give of their best.
- Pupils with learning difficulties are well supported by effective teacher assistants and vigilant teachers.
- Students enjoy the subject very much.

Areas for Improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raise the attainment of boys
- as and when funding can be secured, improve resources for CAD/CAM, and systems and control
- review GCSE focus areas to identify elements of good practice in the teaching of theory and spread these throughout the department
- ensure that all pupils listen attentively to classroom demonstrations
- review the provision the department makes for vocational courses.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop geography and design and technology 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

Sonya Williamson
Her Majesty's Inspector