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Mr A McCourt  
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Dear Mr McCourt

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 10 and 11 January 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Overall students attain satisfactory standards at Key Stage 3 and in national examinations. However, few attain the higher grades reflecting a lack of challenge, especially for the higher ability students.
- Students have relatively good recall of geographical information and use appropriate geographical vocabulary well. Weaknesses remain in their ability to develop reasoned argument and analysis which limits their ability to attain the highest grades.

- Students are well behaved in lessons and good relationships with both teachers and peers are well established. They particularly enjoy those lessons when they are given opportunities to work practically and collaboratively.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in geography is satisfactory.

- Teachers are keen to provide stimulating lessons and an increasing variety of approaches are being introduced, including thinking skills. These strategies have not yet had time to fully impact on standards.
- There remains a tendency to focus on information giving rather than developing reasoning skills. There is limited evidence of enquiry based learning.
- Regular and good use is made of video projection and ICT to enhance teaching.
- Lessons are well structured. Teachers have good subject knowledge and manage the students well although they do not always pose sufficiently challenging questions.
- Assessment is unsatisfactory, especially at Key Stage 3. The recently appointed head of department has recognised that tasks are not sufficiently rigorous and do not provide an accurate analysis of students' achievement and progress and has identified this as an area which needs further development.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is unsatisfactory.

- The Key Stage 3 scheme of work is outdated and in urgent need of review. There are no schemes of work in place for examination classes.
- The structure of the current teaching programme is functional, lacks creativity and is not always relevant to students. There are few opportunities to make use of topical issues and there is too heavy a focus on factual coverage rather than engagement, challenge and enjoyment.
- Insufficient time is allocated for fieldwork. There are few opportunities at Key Stage 3 and provision in exam classes meets minimum requirements only.

### Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are satisfactory.

- In recent years the department has struggled with a culture which has been reactive rather than dynamic and developmental. The newly appointed subject leader is aware of the key issues which need to be addressed. He has a clear vision for the subject and a plan of action

on how to achieve this. He has been in post for an insufficient length of time to have made a noticeable impact as yet.

- Insufficient opportunities in recent years to pursue subject specific professional development have meant that the department has been marginalised in terms of mainstream developments in the subject. Teachers in the department are eager to rectify this and are keen to take advantage of new opportunities. They show good capacity and enthusiasm to change things for the better.
- The innovative and exciting cross-curricular links being developed by the head of department in partnership with modern foreign languages (MFL) provide excellent opportunities to both enrich learning and enjoyment and enhance global citizenship and understanding.

Subject issue: the global dimension

Students' learning about the global dimension is satisfactory.

- Students have adequate knowledge of distant localities, places and global issues. However, their understanding is not cohesive and they do not always make the links between the local and the global.
- Insufficient attention is paid in the curriculum to global issues such as interdependence and sustainability and students' understanding of these concepts remains less well developed.
- There are excellent opportunities through the partnership with languages to raise awareness of the global dimension and global issues.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is satisfactory.

- Recently arrived students with English as an additional language (EAL) receive good individual support. Support for other pupils is more limited during geography lessons.
- Increasingly effective use is being made of assessment for learning strategies to engage all pupils in developing their learning.
- There is a lack of evidence for regular use of differentiated approaches, in particular more able pupils are not being sufficiently challenged and stretched.

Areas for improvement

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

- the need to change the culture of the department to encourage teaching and learning which will engage pupils more effectively and promote a more creative curriculum

- producing a three year development plan which clearly prioritises actions, makes the process manageable and improves the quality of geographical provision
- ensuring that new schemes of work are produced to support learning at Key Stage 3 as well as in examination classes
- further developing the links and enrichment opportunities being developed in partnership with modern foreign languages.

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

Leszek Iwaskow  
Her Majesty's Inspector  
Specialist Adviser for Geography