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Mr M Emmerson  
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Dear Mr Emmerson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 23-24 January 2007 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 the headteacher and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory in Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4.

- Standards at the end of Year 9 have risen since 2004, with a significant rise in 2006, when 46% of pupils reached the average level expected for their age. This is, however, lower than the national average and lower than the proportion of pupils reaching this level in English, maths

and science in the school. Fewer pupils are reaching the higher levels 6 and 7 than in previous years.

- Standards at GCSE have shown a steady increase since 2002 to reach 75% A\* - C in 2006 (except in 2004 when A\* - C grades were very low). In 2006 all girls gained a graded A\* - G pass but the percentage was lower for boys. Results overall in 2006 were 10% above the target set for the department.
- Pupils' progress as reflected in their exercise books and from talking to them was good for the more able pupils. They were able to build on prior learning effectively. For other pupils it was not always evident that they had made sufficient progress.
- Pupils' attitudes to work were generally good and Year 11 pupils were keen to progress; they were well motivated and understood the need for careful revision. In the lessons observed many pupils applied themselves well to the tasks but a significant minority produced less work than expected.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory with some good features.

- There is only one specialist geography teacher, which is unusual in a school of this size.
- Lessons are planned from detailed and effective schemes of work. These provide a good basis from which non-specialist teachers are able to teach geography.
- Pupils' understanding of prior work is generally good, for example, pupils in Year 9 have a good grasp of less economically developed parts of the world and those that are more economically developed. Some pupils were also developing a keen awareness and understanding of stereotyping.
- The majority of pupils have been given targets to work towards, but some have only one target. Targets are not always updated on a regular basis. Pupils knew that they had been told what National Curriculum levels they were working at but were not sure what this meant.
- The literacy ability of a significant number of pupils held them back, in part due to their learning difficulties and because some had English as an additional language. Too few opportunities are being created by providing support through more structured writing or through the modelling of answers.
- There were examples of pupils' excellent creative writing within the context of geographical work, such as pieces on homelessness.
- Marking is generally very good with helpful suggestions to guide pupils' improvement. However, where work is unacceptable teachers do not always ask for it to be redone.
- Although now increasing the numbers of pupils opting for GCSE geography is disappointingly low.

- The pupil self-assessment strategies used in the Year 7 class were too complex for the majority of pupils to understand.

## Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Schemes of work support the teaching of geography particularly well in Years 7 to 9. Full schemes of work were not seen for Years 10 and 11.
- There are too few opportunities in Years 7 to 11 to focus upon issues of sustainability, which is a key topic for pupils today.
- The department is not meeting statutory requirements for geography fieldwork.
- The carousel arrangement for geography with the other humanities subjects was commented on negatively in the last inspection but is still in place and is possibly a factor in the low numbers studying geography in Years 10 and 11.

## Leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory.

- The new head of department is getting to grips with the department but has had few opportunities for professional development with other geographers in other schools, in order to share ideas and good practice.
- The analysis of examination results has provided appropriate points for future action. The expectation that two pieces of coursework will be completed during Year 10 is appropriate, given the difficulty of all pupils meeting deadlines in Year 11.
- Pupils reported that the revision classes that were set up were very useful and the post-mock examination sessions were particularly helpful in highlighting where they needed to focus. However, those who needed this help most did not always attend the session.
- Monitoring and evaluation has been satisfactory and the work scrutiny has shown some significant differences in marking between teaching groups, of which the department is aware.

## Subject issue: The global dimension

- Issues concerning global sustainability and the economic interdependence between nations are given insufficient attention in the curriculum for Years 7 to 9.

## Inclusion

The quality of inclusion is good.

- Pupils from minority ethnic groups are generally achieving well and there is good additional adult support for pupils who do not speak English as their first language.
- Good language support is also provided for the department when it wishes to make contact with parents who do not speak English.

## Areas for improvement

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

- improve provision for fieldwork to meet the statutory requirements
- refine the department's target setting practice; so that pupils fully understand their targets and that they are reviewed on a more regular basis
- consider the progression needed in self-assessment strategies from Year 7 to Year 11, to enable pupils to use this more effectively in their learning
- provide professional development opportunities for the sole geography teacher as well as the non-specialists who are delivering the subject.

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

Jenny Smith  
Her Majesty's Inspector