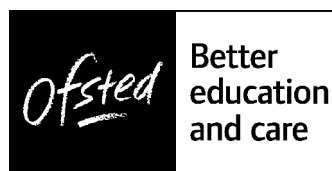


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24 January 2007

Mr H Vafeas
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Vafeas

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 30 November and 01 December 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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Standards at the end of Year 9 are well above the national average, with a high proportion of pupils reaching Level 6 and above.
- Standards in GCSE are also well above the national average. In 2006 31% achieved the highest grades of A and A* reflecting an 11% rise from results in 2005. Pupils of all abilities make good progress from Year 7 to Year 11.
- All students have achieved a pass at A Level in the last four years but there was a fall in the number gaining the highest grades of A and B in 2006.
- Achievement in lessons is good with pupils making very good progress in the lessons observed. Pupils have a good understanding of complex geographical concepts and processes and can build on prior learning well.

- Behaviour in all lessons observed was excellent; pupils were keen to learn and applied themselves well to tasks set.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in geography is good and has a number of outstanding features.

- Lessons observed were well planned with a variety of activities. These maintained pupils' interest well, allowing for effective paired, group and whole class discussion.
- Lessons began with a starter activity, paid good attention to literacy issues, and made very effective use of well-prepared resources. However, opportunities to use ICT facilities in lessons are too limited.
- The teachers' attention to a variety of learning styles shone through the work of the department.
- Teacher subject knowledge is very good and the quality of their questioning is effective, often seeking further exemplification where pupils are tempted to give short answers.
- The brisk pace of lessons ensured that pupils not only made very good progress but learning was lively, engaging and participatory.
- Pupils reported that they felt their teachers were very helpful offering extra support when they needed it beyond normal class time and rated geography highly as a consequence.
- Marking was variable but was never less than satisfactory. It did not always clearly identify what pupils needed to do to improve their work.
- Assessments are undertaken on a regular basis and, although some are a little dated, pupils are provided with the assessment criteria and mark scheme to ensure that they understand what is being asked of them. The department makes an outstanding contribution to the whole school strategy of 'assessment for learning'. The initial assessment of pupils' geography standards when they start at the school in Year 7 is to be commended.
- A tracking sheet exists for pupils to complete after each assessment and they have excellent potential. However, at present their use has slipped into abeyance. Re-using these sheets would provide an excellent basis for accurate judgements on pupils' standards at the end of Year 9.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- Schemes of work are detailed and provide a clear sense of progression of geographical skills and concepts, across the year groups.
- Recent revisions to the schemes of work are well thought out, placing some units of work into more appropriate years but ICT opportunities are insufficiently identified.
- Fieldwork provision is excellent and pupils value these opportunities highly.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- This is a highly effective department that works well together, with a shared vision.
- Teachers share their ideas and resources effectively.
- The department is very well led by the subject leader, who has purposefully used her own research to address approaches to teaching and learning.
- A very good department development plan exists, with achievable aims, which are focussed on improving teaching and learning further. It has very clear links to the school development plan.

Subject issue: global dimension

The quality of provision in this area is good.

- A very good contribution to understanding global issues is in place in all years and especially from Year 9 to Year 13. This includes global decision-making and the impact of trans-national companies.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is good.

- Good consideration is given to the more able pupils in geography lessons and those with learning difficulties are well supported. There is further scope for extending the most able pupils beyond classroom activities, especially for those who are gifted and talented in the subject.

Areas for improvement

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

- ensure that there is increased access to ICT in classroom activities and, access to interactive white boards when finances allow
- consider some out of class activities particularly for gifted and talented pupils in geography.

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