

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr R Hewitt
Headteacher
West Hill School
Thompson Cross
Stalybridge
SK15 1 LX

Dear Mr Hewitt

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 14 and 15 March to look at work in geography.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the geography visit had a particular focus on the global dimension.

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 lessons at each Key Stage.

The overall effectiveness of geography was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall.

- Pupils have average attainment on entry and make satisfactory progress across both Key Stages so that they reach nationally expected standards.
- Higher attaining pupils make better progress than lower attaining pupils or those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Lower attaining pupils are not sufficiently well supported with their literacy

and the curriculum content and teaching and learning styles do not meet their needs so well.

- Pupils have very positive attitudes to geography. They behave well and attend well. Punctuality is good.
- As a result of the contribution that the subject makes to pupils' social, moral and spiritual development, they show good levels of interest in geography.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Specialist staff have good subject knowledge; they anticipate pupils' questions and accurately correct their misconceptions.
- The range of teaching and learning styles being used is widening. Pupils appreciate the increasing attention being given to consideration of their preferred learning styles and the need to vary activities within a lesson. However, there is still too much emphasis on teacher led activities, copying and note-taking rather than interactive learning.
- Although there is a good focus on key geographical vocabulary, teachers do not always support pupils with their literacy and numeracy skills.
- There is too much variation in the quality of marking. The best marking is very good with clear targets and strategies for improvement but the majority is not subject specific and does not help pupils to move forward.
- Teachers have very good relationships with their pupils as a result of effective classroom management and organisation. They have high expectations of work and behaviour. They manage behaviour well.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Good links are made between geography and other areas of the curriculum such as history, science and citizenship.
- The use of homework is good. It is particularly well used to promote independent learning and the use of ICT.
- Fieldwork is not fully integrated into the work for each year group so that pupils can develop progression in their observational and recording skills.
- Schemes of work are overly focused on content and do not show clear progression of geographical understanding. They do not take into account differences in approach needed to meet the needs of the pupils in different ability sets. Assessment opportunities are not systematically built in.

- Changes to assessment strategies at Key Stage 3 are helping to promote creativity. They are most effective when teachers give pupils support with how to structure their tasks and ensure that the emphasis is on showing their geographical understanding.

Leadership and management of the subject

Leadership and management of geography are satisfactory.

- Leadership and management developments have been limited by staffing difficulties within the department and the relatively limited whole school procedures for monitoring and evaluating the work of departments.
- There is good capacity for improvement through the work of the specialist staff and the greater staffing stability that has recently been achieved. There is clear determination to raise the achievement of pupils further.
- Mechanisms available for self-evaluation within the department are limited. Other than through performance management, there is no focused monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning and no monitoring of pupils' work or teachers' planning. Pupil views are gathered only informally.
- The management of assessment data and target setting procedures are developing well in response to whole school systems. Although the data is being used to raise expectations, it is not used to identify what support some pupils need. Neither is it sufficiently analysed to check for discrepancies in achievement between groups of pupils.
- The quality of improvement planning is not sufficiently related to the impact of developments on the outcomes for pupils.

Subject issue: the global dimension

Pupils' learning about the global dimension is satisfactory.

- References are made to globalisation within the geography curriculum. In the summer term of Year 9 pupils have a curriculum which is focused on global issues.
- Pupils have adequate awareness of globalisation through citizenship topics about poverty, personal finance, sustainability and social enterprise.
- Not all pupils have a good understanding of the links between their personal actions and wider global communities. They have only a satisfactory understanding of cultural contrasts at a national level.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is satisfactory.

- All pupils make at least satisfactory progress and benefit from good relationships with staff.
- Higher attaining pupils make the best progress. Lower attaining pupils do not always receive the support they need for literacy. Teaching and learning styles do not consistently match their needs.
- The potential of data analysis to identify possible discrepancies in achievement is only just being investigated.

Areas for improvement

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

- raise the achievement of lower attaining pupils
- continue to improve the range of teaching and learning styles being used
- ensure that marking is subject specific and helps pupils to improve their work
- develop schemes of work that better meet the needs of all learners and show clear progression of geographical skills and understanding
- monitor and evaluate the work of the department systematically with reference to a wide range of evidence
- focus improvement planning on raising pupils' achievement.

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

Sonya Williamson
Her Majesty's Inspector