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Dear Ms Considine

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 03 and 04 December 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 focus on how literacy is being used to enhance learning 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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of data, analysis of pupils' work and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good because pupils make good progress overall. Standards are broadly satisfactory.

- Pupils join the school with standards that are below average. They come into Year 7 having undertaken a range of different geographical experiences in their feeder primary schools.

- By the end of Key Stage 3, most pupils have made good progress to attain broadly average standards. By Year 9 pupils', skills, knowledge and understanding have developed well which is demonstrated effectively in their work on 'Global Fashion'.
- Standards in Key Stage 4 are below average. In 2007, 46% achieved the GCSE pass rate of A\*-C which reflects the ability of the pupils opting for geography. This cohort comprised a larger than average number of pupils with learning difficulties. Outcomes represented good progress from their starting points. The majority of pupils met their targets.
- Year 11 coursework is of a good standard with most pupils providing clear explanations of geographical patterns and processes as seen in their study of location.
- There is careful monitoring of pupils' progress on the GCSE course. Steps are being taken to increase the range of ability of pupils participating on future courses in order to secure higher attainment in the future.
- Teachers enjoy very good relationships with pupils in the main. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour in lessons are generally good, although a small minority disengage with their learning when the tasks are not well matched to their needs and interests.
- Most pupils take a pride in their work. From Year 7 onwards, pupils are increasingly being encouraged to evaluate their own work. This is increasing their understanding of what they need to do to get better.

### Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers' planning is excellent and the whole school planning framework is used effectively by all teachers.
- Examples of good and outstanding teaching were observed where resources were carefully selected to increase interest and add value to the session. These lessons carefully built on previous learning, extended pupils' thinking and had a brisk pace.
- A variety of appropriate teaching and learning activities engaged pupils and sustained their interest well. For example, well chosen video material and images were used to illustrate different eco-systems and volcanic activity.
- A range of assessment for learning techniques was observed. When used well, they effectively promoted interest, collaboration and participation. Skilful questioning required pupils to extend their thinking.
- In the satisfactory lessons observed, although there were good elements, over-lengthy teacher exposition or tasks that did not extend the higher attaining pupils prevented them from making the progress they were capable of.

- Teachers' subject knowledge is good. Information and communication technology (ICT) is also used well by teachers and pupils to support learning.
- The department has made a good start in revising and developing a high quality structure for assessing pupils' work, although this has yet to be fully implemented.
- All pupils' work is assessed at key times such as at the end of units of work when diagnostic feedback is given to them. Marking in exercise books does not always give clear enough guidance on what pupils need to do next to improve their geographical skills, knowledge and understanding.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The school has a good scheme of work that has been improved by the new head of Geography who has revised and updated all units of work as they are being taught.
- Extended homework projects are particularly effective in developing pupils' in-depth understanding of themes. Pupils enjoy these especially when, they are given some good opportunities for creativity in the presentation and production of their work.
- On-line schemes of work have been established with the potential to identify appropriate cross-curricular links. However, geography links with other subjects have yet to be fully exploited.
- Fieldwork experiences to the Gower peninsular, Millennium Point and Hall Green contribute greatly to pupils' learning and are highly appreciated. However, in Key Stage 3, opportunities are not always taken to use field work, real examples or the locality to motivate and inspire pupils.
- The school does not have an accurate picture of the geographical topics studied in the main feeder primary schools.

### Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- The recently appointed head of geography is keen and enthusiastic. She is up to date with developments and has swiftly and successfully established an accurate understanding of the strengths in the subject and the areas which need further development.
- The humanities departmental self-evaluation is incisive, analytical and accurate. The document is very clear about the further improvements that the geography department needs to make and these have been incorporated into an appropriate plan of action.
- Teaching and learning practice is being successfully influenced in the department through paired observation and coaching.

## Subject issue

The extent to which literacy is being used to enhance learning in geography is good.

- Lessons include a very good range of learning activities and resources which provide varied opportunities for speaking and listening.
- Pupils' writing tasks are varied with most completing a wide range of types of writing. For example, Year 9 pupils write factual pieces, diaries and journalistic accounts as part of their work on 'Global Fashion'.
- Pupils read an appropriate range of material, including many high quality presentations. There are some good examples of non-fiction texts being used to support learning, particularly with those pupils who have learning difficulties. However, opportunities are not always taken to use fiction and non-fiction texts to support or add additional interest in geography lessons.

## Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in geography is good.

- In most lessons seen, work was well matched to pupils' differing learning needs. Questioning was widely distributed and involved all pupils. There was a purposeful, collaborative ethos so that most pupils were fully involved in their learning.
- Vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties receive excellent levels of support from both teaching assistants and teachers. As a consequence, they make very good progress. However, opportunities were sometimes missed to extend the higher attaining pupils in Key Stage 3 by giving them more challenging tasks.
- The progress of all pupils is carefully tracked so that any underachievement is identified so that action can be taken to address this.

## Areas for improvement

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

- ensure that marking consistently provides pupils with guidance on how well they are doing and what they need to do next to improve
- strengthen the impact of field work on the Key Stage 3 curriculum
- establish links with the main feeder primary schools to increase the school's understanding of what has been taught previously and the geographical knowledge and skills that pupils bring with them on entry.

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 the next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Paul Weston  
Her Majesty's Inspector