

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



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Mrs Westwood
Headteacher
Lyndon School Humanities College
Daylesford Road
Solihull
West Midlands
B92 8EJ

Dear Mrs Westwood

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 06-07 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 nine part lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement and standards

Standards are satisfactory and pupils make good progress overall.

- Pupils enter Year 7 having had a wide variety of differing geographical experiences. Overall, standards are below average when they enter the school, with fewer at the higher levels.
- By the end of Key Stage 3 most pupils make good progress to achieve average standards.

- Standards are slightly below average at the end of Key Stage 4. In 2007, 59% achieved the GCSE pass rate of A*-C. Girls achieved significantly better than boys. The majority of pupils met or exceeded their targets. The school's robust data analysis and scrutiny of work shows that most pupils make good progress.
- In both Key Stage 3 and 4, fewer pupils achieve at the higher levels. However, increased challenge and higher expectations by the geography team, is narrowing the gap rapidly with national outcomes.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour in lessons are good in the main. Although some groups exhibit challenging behaviour, this is managed appropriately by teachers. Most pupils take a pride in their work. Teachers mostly enjoy good relationships with pupils.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching is good.

- Teachers plan thoroughly and their subject knowledge is good. A variety of teaching and learning activities involve pupils and sustain their interest well. Most lessons have a brisk pace and carefully build on previous learning to extend pupils' thinking.
- Resources are carefully selected to engage and challenge pupils. Teachers are increasingly making lessons interesting and fun. For example, pupils in Year 7 used modelling clay to form a hill, plotted marks at centimetre intervals and connected dots of the same height to successfully increase their understanding of contour lines.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well to enhance teaching but pupils have few opportunities to use ICT to improve their learning.
- A range of assessment for learning techniques is used by teachers to promote interest, collaboration and participation. Activities such as the 'Trading Game' are enjoyed by pupils because they say this challenges them in an interesting way.
- Questions are widely distributed and this increases participation and extends pupils' thinking.
- The team has robust systems in place for assessing pupils' work and tracking their progress. Pupils' work is assessed at key times such as at the end of units of work where thorough diagnostic feedback is given to them.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly and clear guidance is provided. Pupils know their targets, are clear how well they have done and understand what they need to do next to improve.
- Increasingly, pupils are being encouraged to evaluate their own work. This is increasing their understanding of what they need to do to get better. However, the teachers recognise that there is a need to build in increased opportunities to develop further this work.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The Key Stage 3 schemes of work are comprehensive and fully meet national requirements. Regular reviews of the schemes are undertaken with appropriate adjustments and modifications made. The geography team has already begun to consider revisions to its curriculum in the light of national guidance and recognises the need to increase its emphasis on sustainability.
- The GCSE geography course is a popular option in Years 10 and 11, where the well planned and delivered curriculum contributes to pupils' good progress.
- There is good fieldwork when Year 10 pupils investigate the effects of human activity at Stiperstones. However, in Key Stage 3, there are insufficient opportunities to use field work, real examples or the locality to inspire pupils and increase their motivation.
- Projects, such as 'Passport to the World' and 'Investigating Brazil' are enjoyed by the pupils and these help to increase their understanding of themes.
- Curriculum links have been established with other subjects, in particular science. Development is planned to increase further opportunities for the joint delivery of some aspects or themes.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- The team leader is dedicated and committed to improving provision and pupils' progress. The team carefully monitors standards and uses the outcomes to implement changes in order to raise standards further.
- The team has accurately evaluated its work and has a good understanding of strengths and weaknesses and what needs to be done to improve further. The team handbook is very detailed.
- Good opportunities have been taken to keep abreast of current developments in the subject and the geography team has a good awareness of the current issues impacting on the subject.
- The team is increasing its awareness of the wide range of geography experiences that pupils enter the school with, but more work on this would be beneficial.

Subject issue

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

- Participation in 'Learning to Learn' has successfully increased pupils' opportunities to develop their literacy skills in geography.
- A good range of speaking and listening activities are provided for pupils. Pupils are keen to answer questions; they work well collaboratively and confidently read their work to the class when the opportunity is presented.
- In all classrooms, there is an appropriate display of geographical vocabulary. Scrutiny of books shows that pupils complete a variety of writing tasks. For example, Year 9 pupils write notes, journalistic accounts and extended projects as part of their Natural Hazards work.
- Pupils read an appropriate range of material and this is supported by the use of non-fiction books from the school's library. This supports and adds additional interest to geography lessons.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in geography is good overall.

- In lessons work is well planned and matched to pupils' differing learning needs with boys and girls given equal access. Teachers take care to widely distribute questions and involve all pupils in discussions.
- Teachers and teaching assistants provide good support and challenge which helps pupils make good progress.
- The progress of all pupils is carefully tracked so that underachievement is identified and swift action can be taken to address this. A good start has been made in raising the attainment of boys and higher attaining pupils, but the school knows that this work needs to be ongoing and there is still more to do.

Areas for improvement

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

- continue to challenge the higher attaining pupils and increase the proportion of pupils achieving at the upper levels
- increase opportunities for peer and self assessment further, especially by increasing pupils' involvement and understanding of what they need to do next to improve
- increase Key Stage 3 field study opportunities to enhance the first hand experiences of pupils
- continue to develop the new curriculum, linking with other teams where appropriate, to make learning more enjoyable and interesting for pupils.

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