

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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Mr F McEvoy
Headteacher
St John Payne Catholic Comprehensive
School
Patching Hall Lane
Chelmsford
CM1 4BS

Dear Mr McEvoy

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 06 and 07 December 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 and students' work and the observation of seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are both outstanding.

- By the end of Key Stage 3, students have made very good progress and their standards are well above average. For example, Year 9 students have a very good understanding of the steps that can be taken to reduce the impact of earthquakes in vulnerable areas.
- Students continue to make very good progress during Key Stage 4 and their GCSE results are very high. Since 1995, the average proportion of pupils achieving grades A* to C has been 88%. In 2007, 90% achieved

grades A* to C, and 45% achieved grades A* or A. Students have an excellent understanding of the factors influencing the sustainability of North Sea fish stocks.

- Students make excellent progress at A level. In 2007, all A-level students achieved grades A or B and, since 1999, 49% of all candidates have achieved A grades. Students have an excellent understanding of the changing geography of economic activity in China, and of the social consequences of this rapid economic growth.
- Students' personal development is outstanding. They are keen to learn and contribute to lessons, as reflected in their high quality answers to teachers' questions. They respond very positively to teachers' high expectations, especially in the sixth form. Students know that they learn a great deal in geography.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching is outstanding.

- Teachers' excellent subject knowledge and their enthusiasm for geography results in clear explanations and questioning which help students to quickly learn new ideas and vocabulary.
- Lessons use visual resources very effectively, and the interactive whiteboards are used to show slides that are interlinked with video clips. These interesting, up-to-date resources capture students' interest and motivate them to learn.
- Teaching is very well structured and lucid so that there is a brisk pace of learning throughout lessons.
- Questions are used very effectively to involve all pupils in lessons, and to both challenge and extend their understanding. Occasionally, opportunities are missed for students to ask their own questions.
- The teaching ensures that students understand the requirements of the examination syllabuses and know what is needed to achieve the highest grades.
- There is very good marking and assessment for the GCSE and A-level courses so students know their strengths and how to improve their standards. The assessment system for Key Stage 3 is being improved although some students lack precision about how to improve their work.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

- The geography schemes of work together with the high quality learning resources produced for each lesson provide a very good curriculum. They are regularly updated.

- The geography curriculum has common themes of sustainability, justice and the global dimension and so makes a strong contribution to students' knowledge and understanding of citizenship.
- For those students taking exams in 2007, geography was the most popular GCSE option and the second most popular A-level option.
- There are good fieldwork programmes for GCSE and A level but insufficient opportunities for Key Stage 3 students. The high quality GCSE fieldwork in the Peak District and Chelmsford and the A-level work in Wales and Essex result in students' very good achievement.
- Students have very good opportunities for structured enquiry but have insufficient opportunities to devise and answer their own questions.
- Some students have used geographical information systems but more use is needed particularly in Key Stage 3.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are outstanding.

- The geography department's self-evaluation is analytical and accurate. The department is clear about the further improvements that it needs to make.
- There is a high quality analysis of examination results followed by actions to secure further improvement despite the existing very high standards.
- The head of geography leads by example and has helped to create a stable, committed staff team. There is a sustained, successful pursuit of high standards and achievement.
- There is very good use of the school's Intranet to store many teaching and learning resources, many of which are accessible to students.
- A very wide range of high quality learning resources are produced and are very well organised.

Subject issue

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

- Students carry out much extended writing in all year groups. They are very skilled at note taking, especially for examination courses. There is an effective emphasis on understanding and using a wide range of geographical vocabulary. The schemes of work do not have reference to the different types of writing that students will use.
- Reading is an integral part of learning in all lessons. Students read a wide range of information sheets together with magazine and newspaper articles, and text books at Key Stage 3. GCSE and A-level students regularly read more extended texts.

- Students listen carefully. Teachers' use of questions gives many students opportunities to speak, and students know that it is important to be well prepared to answer questions accurately and thoughtfully.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in geography is outstanding overall.

- In all the lessons seen, there was a purposeful, collaborative ethos so that all students were fully involved in learning and teachers were aware of the particular learning needs of individual students.
- There are excellent, well managed revision programmes for GCSE and A level to support all students, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities who also make very good progress.

Areas for improvement

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

- complete the improvements to assessment at Key Stage 3 so that students are precise about how to improve their standards
- develop Key Stage 3 fieldwork provision so that students have opportunities to develop their enquiry skills
- extend the use of geographical information systems to more students.

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

Mike Milton
Additional Inspector