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Mr A Lewis  
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Dear Mr Lewis

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 19 and 20 November 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 and web-based materials, analysis of data, analysis of pupils' work and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is inadequate.

Achievement and standards

Standards in geography are good overall and achievement is satisfactory.

- Pupils gain good examination results but could achieve better. Few really enjoy the subject.
- Good examination results are attained by making sure that pupils are fully aware of how to meet exam criteria. This process is formulaic and does not encourage love of learning about geography.

- Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. They do not make as good progress in geography relative to some other subjects.
- Pupils at Key Stage 3 make least progress because many of the tasks set lack challenge and are too heavily guided.
- Pupils with learning difficulties make less progress than their peers because the work set is often inappropriate and not sufficiently targeted to meet their specific requirements.
- Boys tend to be minimalist when asked to answer questions. Girls tend to be more expansive in their writing, although this is not always focused.
- Pupils' behaviour is generally good. Good relationships were evident in most classrooms. However, pupils are encouraged to be passive listeners and over time develop a dependency culture on their teachers.

### Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall.

- Although much of the teaching observed was mundane, one lesson was outstanding. What set this lesson apart from the rest was that it involved practical activities, was pitched at the correct level, encouraged interaction and engaged and motivated pupils in their learning.
- Most teaching is very didactic with few opportunities made available for pupils to learn independently. Teachers often ensure that the pupils are provided with the correct answers without really checking that they understand the processes or are able to evaluate for themselves.
- There is little attempt made to provide learning tasks appropriate for the ability of the pupils. Lower ability pupils, especially, experience difficulty in accessing work which is inappropriate.
- In too many lessons, too much time is being wasted on copying information, taking notes or colouring in maps and diagrams with no clear learning rationale behind the task. Pupils are frequently being occupied rather than stimulated.
- There is a focus on factual recall rather than the development of geographical enquiry, synthesis, analysis and reasoning.
- Questioning is often closed and requires only simple recall. Pupils are rarely provided with opportunities to express their views.
- Marking policy is not being adhered to. Tests and assignments are marked but there is too much completed work which remains unchecked. There are few diagnostic comments which can inform pupils about how they can improve their work.
- Use of homework is weak. Often this involves finishing off work or revising for a test.
- Resources are adequate to support teaching and learning although there is a tendency to focus on a limited range of texts. There is good access to commercially produced presentations and multi-media.

However, particularly engaging resources such as geographical information systems, for example Google Earth, are rarely used.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is inadequate.

- The Key Stage 3 scheme of work dates back to 1996 and there has been little revision since. It lacks relevance for pupils and is inappropriate for their needs.
- The focus is on factual coverage. There is little indication of how geography is to be delivered. This is especially unhelpful to non-specialists teaching the subject.
- The Key Stage 4 scheme of work is a description of what needs to be covered. There is no consideration about how it might be delivered or what pupils might learn.
- The school does not meet requirements for fieldwork at Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4, the limited fieldwork undertaken is firmly focussed on exam coursework criteria and is heavily structured.

### Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are inadequate.

- The departmental development plan is very weak and has been identified as such by senior managers. There is little of substance or relevance and no improvements have been noted for a number of years.
- Monitoring of the quality of provision has only recently been started at the insistence of senior managers. The quality of analysis of pupils' work is very poor.
- The departmental self evaluation is over-optimistic and does not accurately reflect strengths and weaknesses. Where weaknesses have been identified, for example in fieldwork, these have not been acted on.
- Insufficient time, effort and resources have been allocated towards raising awareness of current developments in the subject. Attendance at relevant training has been minimal and non-specialist teachers are receiving insufficient support.

### Subject issue

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

- The department is not following the literacy policy of the school.
- Literacy is being poorly developed through the subject. It is not considered sufficiently in the planning of lessons.

- Questioning is often closed with pupils being passive listeners. They are only given very limited opportunities to articulate their ideas and express opinions.
- The culture in most lessons does not encourage speaking or much independent writing.
- Pupils show good knowledge of geographical vocabulary but are not encouraged sufficiently to express themselves in order to explain their thinking clearly.
- A limited range of text types are used on a regular basis. Pupils also have limited opportunities to write in a variety of different genres.

## Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in geography is inadequate.

- Provision for pupils with learning difficulties is inadequate. Work set in many lessons is inappropriate to their needs. Equally some of the skills and concepts are too difficult to access using the teaching methods being applied.
- There is very limited individual support for pupils with learning needs in geography.
- There is also little evidence that differentiated methods are being used.
- The very structured whole class approach is not challenging the more able pupils.

## Areas for improvement

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

- show greater accountability in managing, monitoring and developing the subject
- update the schemes of work to make learning more relevant for pupils
- improve provision by encouraging the greater engagement of pupils in lessons especially through enquiry and more independent learning
- make more effective use of marking.

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

Leszek Iwaskow  
Her Majesty's Inspector  
Specialist Adviser for Geography