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Dear Mr Baker

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 21-22 January 2008 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are both good.

- Students 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 students make good progress to achieve above average standards.
- In 2007, standards were well below average at the end of Key Stage 4. Only 25% achieved the GCSE pass rate of A*-C. This is not typical. In

previous years, standards have been at the national average but with fewer at the higher levels. The school's robust data analysis indicates that 79% students are expected to achieve A*-C in 2008 which is above average.

- In the sixth form, students make good progress and achieve above-average standards at Advanced Level year on year. 100% students have achieved a pass grade of A-C in the past two years. Most make good progress because the small numbers opting for geography allows for more personalised learning and individual attention.
- Throughout the school, girls achieve significantly better than boys in geography.
- Students' attitudes and behaviour in lessons are good. They are well behaved and keen to learn even when they are set challenging tasks. Many take pride in their work, although scrutiny of books and folders shows some do not present their work carefully enough. Teachers enjoy good relationships with students.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching is good.

- Teachers' planning is thorough and their subject knowledge is good. A variety of teaching and learning activities are presented which require students to collaborate and participate. This involves them fully in lessons and sustains their interest well.
- Most lessons have a brisk pace and carefully build on previous learning to extend students' thinking. Questions are widely distributed and this increases student participation and extends their thinking.
- Resources are carefully selected to engage and challenge students which make lessons interesting. For example, a card sort activity generated good discussion and helped students in Year 9 begin to understand the complexity of Thailand's tourist industry.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well by teachers to support each lesson. The use of images and video material helps bring the subject to life.
- The systems in place for assessing students' work and tracking their progress are good. Thorough diagnostic feedback is given to students after their work is assessed at key times such as at the end of units of work.
- Students' work is marked regularly and clear guidance is provided. Most know their targets, are clear how well they have done and understand what they need to do next to improve.
- Although some key vocabulary is shared in classrooms and some commercial and students' work is displayed, the learning environment does not always celebrate or promote well enough the range of recent geography work undertaken.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The 'Opening Minds' work in Year 7 is of high quality. Excellent cross-curricular links are made between other subjects such as history, religious education and English. The residential visit to Castleton supports this work very well.
- The Key Stage 3 schemes of work 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 light of national guidance. The need to review and develop the geography scheme of work in Years 8 and 9 is recognised.
- The GCSE geography course has been a declining option in Years 10 and 11 in recent years. However, numbers are now increasing and the well planned and delivered curriculum contributes to students' good progress.
- Students enjoy immensely the high quality GCSE fieldwork in Bakewell and the Advanced Level residential course at Arnside, Cumbria which supports their good achievement.
- Although field work opportunities in Key Stage 3 are satisfactory, there are limited opportunities to use real examples or the locality to benefit students in Years 8 and 9.
- Although ICT is used to support learning, insufficient opportunities are provided for students to use ICT to develop or extend their geography work.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- The geography subject leader is committed to improving provision and students' progress. The team carefully monitors standards and uses the outcomes to implement changes in order to raise standards further.
- Self-evaluation by the humanities department is accurate. Within this, the geography department has a good understanding of strengths and weaknesses and what needs to be done to improve further. These are incorporated into an appropriate plan of action.
- The geography team has a good awareness of the current issues in the subject. However, there are few opportunities to network and liaise with other geography departments to share ideas and good practice.

Subject issue

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

- There is a good emphasis on key geographical vocabulary which is specifically taught and appropriately referred to during lessons.
- Most lessons include a good range of learning activities and resources which provide varied opportunities for speaking and listening.
- Opportunities for writing are satisfactory. However, students do not progressively benefit from increased opportunities to undertake a wider range of differing writing approaches that are planned systematically throughout the curriculum.
- Students read an appropriate range of material, including from a range of geographical texts and computer presentations. However, opportunities are not always taken to use fiction or non-fiction texts to support or add additional interest to geography lessons.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in geography is good overall.

- In lessons, work is well planned and matched to students' differing learning needs with boys and girls given equal access. Teachers take care to widely distribute questions and involve all students in discussions.
- Teachers and teaching assistants provide good support and challenge which helps students make good progress.
- The progress of all students 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 students, but the school knows that this work needs to be ongoing and there is still more to do.
- Good opportunities are provided for gifted and talented students. Participation in the local study 'Is Wirksworth a typical town' and the resultant report demonstrates students' very good achievement.

Areas for improvement

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

- continue to raise standards at Key Stage 4 by further raising the attainment of boys and increasing the proportion of students achieving at the upper levels
- continue to review the Key Stage 3 curriculum in the light of proposed national changes and particularly strengthen the impact of field work, provide wider writing opportunities and use a broader range of fiction and non-fiction reading material.

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