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Dear Mr Reilly

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography and modern languages

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and those of your staff and students, during our visit on 05 and 06 March 2008 to look at work in geography and modern languages (ML).

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subjects, the visit had a particular focus on how literacy is being used to enhance learning in the subject in geography. In ML it had a focus on how reading skills are developing and how reading is used to develop language skills as well as looking at where you are in reaching the benchmarks for provision in Key Stage 4.

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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of five lessons in geography and five lessons in ML.

Geography

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory with some outstanding features.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good because students make good progress overall but standards are satisfactory.

- The school draws students from over 26 primary schools and they 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.
- Results at the end of Key Stage 3 improved in 2007. Most students make good progress to achieve above average standards. Girls performed significantly better than boys.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 were below the national average in 2007 due to the low achievement of girls. This is not typical. In recent years standards have shown a steady increase to be around the national average. The school's data analysis and scrutiny of work shows that most students make good progress and achieve their targets.
- Standards in the sixth form are satisfactory. Most students achieve the grades at GCE AS/A Level which are expected of them, based on their starting points. The small numbers opting for geography allows for more personalised learning and individual attention. Course work is of a particularly high standard.
- In all key stages, fewer students than average achieve at the higher levels.
- Students' attitudes and behaviour in lessons are generally good and they mostly enjoy positive relationships with teachers.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching is satisfactory with good features.

- During the inspection the quality of teaching in lessons observed ranged from outstanding to inadequate. Although lessons are planned carefully they sometimes do not provide sufficient opportunities for differentiated learning activities.
- Where lessons were good or outstanding, resources were carefully selected to engage and challenge students. A variety of teaching and learning activities involved students and sustained their interest well. These lessons have a brisk pace and carefully build on previous learning to extend students' thinking.
- Where lessons were satisfactory or inadequate, the pace of learning was too slow, there was too much teacher talk or poor classroom management.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well by some teachers to support learning. A variety of e-learning strategies are used such as voting systems, video material and a visualiser. However, confidence in using ICT is variable across the department.

- Although a range of assessment for learning techniques is used by teachers to promote interest, collaboration and participation, these are not a matter of routine in all lessons.
- Good systems are in place for assessing pupil's work and tracking their progress. Students' work is assessed at key times such as at the end of units where thorough diagnostic feedback is given to them.
- Students' work is marked regularly, however guidance on how to improve their work is not consistently given. Increasingly, students are being encouraged to evaluate their own work. This is developing their understanding of what they need to do to get better.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The Key Stage 3 schemes of work fully meet national requirements. Topics and themes are carefully selected at Key Stage 3 to provide students with a firm foundation of understanding and skills in Year 7. There is clear progression from local to global studies.
- The geography scheme is continually developing. Recent developments include ICT links, thinking strategies and topics such as global fashion.
- The geography team has already begun to consider revisions to its curriculum in light of national guidance and recognises the need to increase its emphasis on sustainability.
- Fieldwork opportunities in Key Stage 3 are satisfactory. It is good in Key Stage 4 and 5 where visits to Stamford, Whitby and Iceland provide students with real case study experiences and inspire and increase their motivation.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good with some outstanding features.

- The subject leader is showing the characteristics of exceptional leadership. He is dedicated and committed to improving provision and students' progress. Good improvements have been made such as supporting teaching and learning and curriculum development.
- The department is well managed. There are appropriate policies and procedures to steer future developments.
- The department has accurately evaluated its work and has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and what it needs to do to improve. However, the department development plan and self-evaluation form do not precisely identify the impact of the actions taken to improve teaching and learning and standards in geography.
- 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 department is unaware of the wide range of geography experiences that students enter the college with.

Subject issue

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

- Students read an appropriate range of geographical material, including ICT presentations. A particularly good feature is the innovative way the department works with the librarian to develop the library and research skills of students in Years 7 and 9 using newspapers, fiction and non-fiction texts.
- Scrutiny of books shows that students are completing a variety of writing tasks. For example, Year 8 students write persuasive letters to Humberside County Council about erosion of the coast at Holderness.
- An appropriate range of speaking and listening activities are provided for students. In lessons most students are keen to answer questions and, when opportunities are presented, they generally work well collaboratively.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in geography is satisfactory overall.

- Provision for students varies depending on the teacher. In the best lessons, work is well planned and matched to students' differing learning needs with boys and girls given equal access. However, in some lessons, work is often pitched to the middle or lower ability and not enough is expected of the higher attaining pupils.
- Most teachers take care to widely distribute questions and involve all students in discussions. However, in some lessons, the responses to questions are over-dominated by boys. In these lessons, girls often become passive and are not sufficiently engaged in the lesson.
- The progress of all students is carefully tracked so that underachievement is identified and swift action can be taken to address this. A prompt and appropriate response has been made by the department to address and overcome a range of issues which led to the low attainment of girls in Key Stage 4 in 2007.

Areas for improvement

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

- continue to address the variation in teaching practice by eliminating the inconsistency of approach and ensure agreed strategies are implemented consistently

- identify more clearly, in action plans, what the outcome of actions will have on teaching and learning and achievement and standards and ensure that any evaluation identifies more clearly the impact of the actions taken
- continue to revise and implement the new Key Stage 3 curriculum by taking account of national guidance.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop geography in the school.

Modern languages

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be satisfactory with some weaknesses.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall.

- Year 9 teacher assessments indicate that students attain above average results at the end of Year 9. However, the validity of these has been questioned by the school due to the below average 2007 GCSE results and the lack of moderation in Key Stage 3.
- Well tracked student outcomes predict that Year 11 and Year 10 students are attaining in line with the national averages for languages.
- A very small number of Post-16 students gain satisfactory results in A or AS Level.
- Lesson observations and scrutiny of work indicate that standards in all Key Stages are average and progress is mostly satisfactory due to an abundance of satisfactory teaching. In one lesson, where teaching was good, progress was good.
- Evidence shows that students are making satisfactory progress in writing; they can write complex sentences and paragraphs from an early stage of learning. They can decode what they read using clues. They are less confident when it comes to speaking and the mistakes they make in pronunciation hinder their communication.
- Higher attaining students in Key Stage 4 are beginning to understand form and structure and how to improve their work.
- Lower attaining students in Key Stage 3 are prevented from doing as well as they could, by the time allotted per week to learn a language.
- Students spoken to in Key Stages 3 and 4 said they enjoyed learning a language, that it was interesting and that there was a good mixture of activities for learning. Key Stage 4 students were most fulsome in their praise. Key Stage 3 students would prefer to do more active work and work in groups more often.
- Year 12 students were less enthusiastic; they felt that they were not helped to learn as well as they should be and that there was too much work with a text book and 'sheets'. They also do not like having to

have two out of their five periods at lunchtime. Scrutiny of work showed that the level of their work was not sufficiently challenging.

- Students are knowledgeable about how a language can help them in the future but they are less well informed about the cultures of the countries and communities of the languages they are learning.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Subject knowledge is good.
- Teaching methodology is adequate.
- There were some good activities in lessons which maintained interest and motivated students to stay on task; some teachers used ICT satisfactorily to engage learners.
- However, apart from one lesson which was good, pace and challenge in lessons were not as good as they could be.
- In lessons observed, lesson objectives were set and shared with students but they were not always reached because planning was too minimal and did not lead to their achievement.
- In the one unsatisfactory lesson, weak behaviour management impeded learning.
- The target language was used insufficiently by most teachers and so students did not have a regular role model; nor did they have sufficient opportunities to speak and practise their pronunciation to become adept speakers.
- Students use ICT rarely, particularly individually in lessons, to enhance their learning by, for example, drafting and redrafting text for accuracy.
- Marking is variable; there is some which provides good comments and targets to help students improve, and some which is simply ticks.
- Assessment is regular and students say they find it helpful. The process is currently undergoing whole-school change.
- Overall, there is too much variation in teaching quality.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is unsatisfactory.

- Schemes of work are minimal; they follow the overviews provided by the text books in use. A number of opportunities are not built in, such as assessment, reading and ICT.
- The school provides two languages in Key Stage 3 – French and German. Students are allocated a language in Year 7 but the school tries to be as flexible as possible when parents/carers request the other one. There is no second language.
- In Key Stage 4 there is a choice of French, German and Italian. There are nine students who take two languages in both Years 10 and 11.

- The time on the timetable per week for Key Stage 4 is adequate. In Year 12 it relies on two lunchtimes to enable students to have enough teaching time. For Key Stage 3 the time is suitable for the large majority of students but for a significant minority, the lower attaining students, it is insufficient. Moreover, it is not clear what programme they are following in their reduced time, nor how they might be reintegrated into mainstream provision should they wish, or should it become appropriate for them to do so.
- The pathways in Key Stage 4 are academic, accredited by GCSE.
- All students' entitlement to use ICT in a language to enhance learning is not met.
- The school does not yet take account of the experiences of students who have learned a language in Key Stage 2, some of whom have learned one for three years. It is now in communication with the two Bourne cluster groups of primary schools.

Leadership and management of ML

Overall, leadership and management are satisfactory.

- The relatively new senior leadership team (SLT) is supportive of languages and, through its whole-school initiatives with middle management, is in the process of improving the languages department's provision, providing both training and support.
- The departmental development plan is satisfactory but it is not as sharp as it needs to be. For example, it does not identify who is responsible for certain outcomes, leaving it to 'the department' in general. Nor does it identify impact on student outcomes in the success criteria. Issues such as take-up at Key Stage 4 and the provision in Key Stage 3 are not identified.
- Subject self-evaluation is in its early stages and is not yet underpinned by good evidence. For example, monitoring and evaluation of lessons within the department has lapsed.
- Resources are satisfactory. The school has foreign language assistants for both French and German.
- The rationale for the school's decision in September 2007 to reduce languages time for lower attaining students across Key Stage 3 is founded on its desire to increase literacy levels. This does, however, seriously disadvantage these students in terms of their achievement in a language by the end of Key Stage 3 and the challenge for the school is to look to more creative ways of improving literacy rather than taking time away from learning a language.

How close the school is to reaching the benchmarks for language take-up in Key Stage 4

- Last year's Year 11 cohort and GCSE entry was well above the national average. This year these have declined significantly and the current

Year 10 has just 24% of students taking a language. The school revised its curriculum model two years ago.

- Whilst the school advises students in Year 9 as to how useful a language can be for their economic prospects, including bringing in outside speakers, it does not actively encourage all students to consider learning a language in Key Stage 4, and has no formal plans to achieve the minimum benchmark of 50% take-up.

The development of reading skills and how well reading is used to develop language skills

This is satisfactory.

- Students can decode what they are set to read and use context, clues and their knowledge of English to help them.
- They say they use dictionaries to help them translate text and these were available in classrooms although not used in the lessons observed.
- Younger students demonstrated that they could reuse the language they read in simple writing.
- In a Year 10 German lesson text was used well to help students understand how to improve coursework.
- In Key Stage 3 students were not confident when reading text aloud and made many mistakes. In some lessons observed there were missed opportunities for using text to help students learn, for example, with Year 12.
- Some students have specially produced French, German or Italian magazines which are sometimes used in lessons. However, there is no bank of authentic reading materials such as comics, magazines, newspapers, or internet texts, and students say reading is mostly from the text book.
- Reading opportunities are not built into the schemes of work.

Inclusion

Overall, this is unsatisfactory.

- A teaching assistant in a lower attaining Year 9 lesson provided good support.
- The school's tracking shows some underachievement by boys in Year 10. This was not noticeable in lessons and is put down by the department to the boys' attitude to coursework. This has not yet been tackled.
- Differentiation was not built into the majority of lesson plans.
- Lower attaining Key Stage 3 students are disadvantaged because they have only one period of 60 minutes a week in which to learn a language.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing the use of the spoken language in lessons: ensuring that teachers are good role models and that students have intensive practice in speaking and pronunciation so that their communication improves
- ensuring that very regular monitoring and evaluation of provision is embedded in the department, and that the outcomes are rigorously followed up so that teaching, learning and marking improve and all students achieve better
- reviewing the curriculum to improve the opportunities all learners have to learn a language and make good progress.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop ML in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and local learning and skills council. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Paul Weston
Her Majesty's Inspector