

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



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Mr A Linnell  
Headteacher  
Desborough School  
Shoppenhangers Road  
Maidenhead  
SL6 2QB

Dear Mr Linnell

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 25 and 26 March 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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of data and students' work and the observation of seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are both satisfactory.

- Students make satisfactory progress during Key Stage 3 with their knowledge and understanding of geography but insufficient progress in developing their enquiry skills so that they can ask and answer their own geographical questions. Standards at the end of Year 9 are broadly average.
- In the 2007 GCSE results, students' standards were broadly average although they did not achieve in geography as well as in their other

subjects. Since then, some improvements have been made to coursework and revision support. Students are currently making satisfactory progress and achieving average standards. In a class debate, Year 11 students had a good understanding of the different viewpoints held about the advantages and disadvantages of wind farms.

- The A Level results were average in 2007. The current A Level students are making sound progress and their standards are average. For example, Year 13 students explain accurately the changes to the active layer of the tundra from May to November.
- Students are generally well behaved and keen to learn, and often ask their own questions during lessons. In two lessons seen, students' learning was better than the teaching because of their positive attitudes to work. However, students do not always respond to their teachers' written comments about their work and a number of sixth formers have gaps in their work.

### Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching is satisfactory.

- The quality of lessons ranges from good with some outstanding features to unsatisfactory. A common strength of lessons is that there are good relationships between teachers and students, and students find teachers to be supportive and helpful.
- In good lessons there is a brisk pace of learning that starts as soon as students enter the room. Teaching is very well structured, clear and concise and effective links are made to examination requirements. A good range of varied resources are used to actively involve and challenge students of all abilities. Lesson planning identifies clearly how students' learning will be assessed.
- Where the teaching is less effective, there is too much emphasis on text books and work sheets that do not interest and challenge the students sufficiently. In addition, some activities are not well organised to make the best use of learning time.
- There is some good use of information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching which enhances students' learning but opportunities are missed in a minority of lessons.
- Most students know their current National Curriculum levels or grades for GCSE and A Level, and their end-of-year target levels and grades. However, they are not always clear about the action they need to take to improve their standards.
- Teachers usually mark students' books regularly but their comments do not always give clear information about the strengths of their work and points for improvement.
- In a few classes, students have assessed their own work as well as the work of other students.

## Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum provides a clear structure for progression in students' knowledge and understanding of geography but not for the development of their enquiry skills. The curriculum includes education for sustainability and the global dimension, but does not provide opportunities for students to work with geographical information systems.
- The schemes of work for Key Stage 3 do not provide a record of the department's best practice in teaching different topics. They also do not bring together different documents about, for example, the use of students' literacy skills and learning activities for gifted and talented students.
- Although there have been Key Stage 3 fieldwork activities in the past, there is not a planned programme of fieldwork for the current school year. There are some good fieldwork opportunities for GCSE and A Level including some residential courses.
- Teachers use an annotated GCSE syllabus to guide their lesson planning rather than a scheme of work. The school does not have a way of recording its best practice in teaching and assessing the different GCSE topics.
- The A Level course covers the necessary material and benefits from fieldwork in Devon that is taught by specialist teachers.

## Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are satisfactory.

- The school's self-evaluation of geography is accurate.
- Most students make satisfactory progress and have positive attitudes towards the subject. However, provision is inconsistent. This prevents some students consistently making the rates of progress they are capable of. A satisfactory range of actions have been taken to improve teaching so that it becomes consistently good but these have not been fully effective.
- The geography improvement plan has well-chosen priorities. However, insufficient emphasis is given to its deadlines for actions within the school year and to the responsibilities allocated to individual members of staff. Also, the plan does not state how it will be known that priorities have been achieved successfully.
- The survey of students' views about their learning in geography has been trialled in a few classes but has not been systematically adopted, especially with A Level and GCSE classes.

## Subject issue

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

- Key geographical vocabulary is displayed in all geography classrooms. There have been audits of students' use of their literacy skills in geography but the outcomes have not been fully incorporated into the schemes of work.
- There are some good examples of students using their literacy skills to improve both their geographical understanding and the quality of writing in geography.
- In a Year 11 lesson, students were well prepared for a good quality debate about whether or not a wind farm should be granted planning permission.
- The learning activities were very well structured in a Year 10 lesson to prepare students to write a report on the Bhopal disaster.
- Some Key Stage 3 assessment tasks include the use of students' literacy skills as, for example, they write newspaper reports about a flood and give presentations about volcanoes.

## Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in geography is satisfactory overall.

- There are good relationships between students and adults. Teachers work hard to involve all students in lessons, including those with English as an additional language.
- Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make similar progress to other students because the setting arrangements help match work to their learning needs. Teaching assistants are used well to provide planned support during lessons.
- In a Year 9 bottom set, the students made good progress in understanding the advantages and disadvantages of fair trade. They took pride in their work, and all pupils were fully involved in the lesson, including students with English as an additional language. All made good progress because of the good teaching coupled with varied and interesting activities, and the effective support for individuals provided by the teacher and a teaching assistant.

## Areas for improvement

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

- secure consistently good use of assessment so that it helps to improve students' learning
- rewrite the Key Stage 3 scheme of work so that it includes the development of students' skills for fieldwork, geographical information

systems and enquiry as well as giving guidance to teachers about interesting learning activities and resources that match students' needs and interests

- ensure that the geography improvement plan is effective in helping the geography department improve its provision and the students to progress more rapidly than at present.

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