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Mr Tissot  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Tissot

### Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 29 and 30 September 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 effectively geography teaching and the curriculum promotes community cohesion.

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, analysis of students' work and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

### Achievement and standards

Achievement is good. Standards in Key Stage 4 are above average whilst standards in Key Stage 3 are in line with national expectations.

- Standards at the end of Year 9 are improving and more students are attaining the higher National Curriculum levels.
- Students are developing the skills of extended writing and are able to describe and offer simple explanations of patterns and processes in geography. They display a good factual knowledge of places they have studied and maps and graphs are accurately drawn.

- Examination results have improved rapidly over the last two years and the proportion of students attaining A to C grades is above the national average.
- Students make effective notes that provide them with good detail for examination revision. They demonstrate a good understanding of the key concepts that underpin the themes they study and are able to explain cause and effect and provide a range of solutions to issues.
- Students make good progress in lessons as a result of the good teaching and challenging expectations set by the staff. They know their targets and have a good idea of what they have to do to attain them.
- The behaviour of the students in lessons was very good due to the positive learning climate established by the teachers and the consistent application of the school's expectations.
- Students enjoy geography.

### Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching is good.

- Teachers plan their lessons in suitable detail using the school's proforma. Usually they include learning outcomes that are shared with the students, but occasionally these are stated as tasks to complete.
- Lessons have a clear structure and this helps ensure a good pace to learning.
- The expectations that teachers have of students have improved and they are planning work effectively to ensure that there is a suitable level of challenge. The needs of different learners are met well.
- Teachers use a reasonable range of activities in lessons that engage students in their learning but the opportunities for using different groupings of students is not always taken.
- All teachers are confident in their subject knowledge as demonstrated in their explanations.
- Information technology is used well by most teachers to support whole-class teaching.
- Students' work is marked regularly with good summative comments written to indicate to students what they have to do to improve and reach the next level. Oral feedback to students in lessons is used effectively.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum in Key Stage 3 is broad and balanced and includes a number of contemporary units such as global fashion and the world of sport. However the curriculum is only partially adapted to meet the new Key Stage 3 requirements.

- All schemes of work for Key Stage 3 are in place and available on the school's intranet. They provide teachers with clear guidance and expectations for each unit with a formal assessment built effectively into each. A good range of assessment strategies are used and the criteria are written so that students understand what is required to reach each National Curriculum level.
- The GCSE specification builds effectively on students' prior learning and is well suited to their needs.
- The programme of fieldwork is in its early stage of development. It currently focuses on the local area in both key stages.
- There are good displays of students' work in the geography classroom.

### Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- The head of geography has a well thought out vision for the development of geography in the school. He effectively leads and manages the department and has a good understanding of its strengths and the areas requiring improvement.
- There is a clear improvement plan in place that has at its centre improving student outcomes. The plan is manageable and reflects whole school priorities.
- All other departmental information, including a useful handbook, is stored on line so it is accessible to all staff.
- The head of department has good opportunities to undertake first hand observation of the other staff teaching geography and also undertakes regular scrutiny of students' work.
- The regular formal assessments provide good information about the performance of the students and this is used well to inform target setting.
- Senior leaders have a good understanding of the quality of geography.

### Subject issue

The effectiveness of geography teaching and the curriculum in promoting community cohesion is good.

- There is a good focus in the curriculum from the local, through the national to the global scale both in the study of place and through specific themes.
- Geography is helping students understand how places and people are both similar and different and to understand different cultures and their place in society.
- Through the study of issues, for example the life of a child worker sewing footballs, students are able to empathise with others and see how actions in certain places affect lives elsewhere.

- The local fieldwork gives them a good understanding of various issues in their immediate community.

#### Areas for improvement

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

- use a greater variety of teaching and learning strategies, particularly in Key Stage 3, so as to develop the students' skills in active and independent learning
- devise a programme of fieldwork across both key stages that provides all students with the opportunity to progressively develop the skills of first-hand observation, measuring and recording of geographical phenomena
- evaluate how well the current Key Stage 3 schemes of work match the requirements of the new geography curriculum and where required modify these accordingly.

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 Dowgill  
Additional Inspector