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Dear Mr Swatton

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography 2008/09

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 23 and 24 October 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 promote 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 nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good. There are some outstanding features as well as some areas for further improvement.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are both good.

- Students make good progress during Key Stage 3 with their knowledge and understanding of geography but only satisfactory progress in developing their personal enquiry skills so that they can ask and answer their own geographical questions. Standards at the end of Year 9 are above average.

- The proportion of students taking the GCSE course is well above the national average. Students make excellent progress and achieve high standards because teaching is consistently good, work is well planned, challenging targets are set for each student and students are very positive and keen to learn. Different groups of students, including boys and girls, have similar levels of high achievement.
- A small group of lower-attaining students take the short GCSE course as part of a programme of vocational education. These students make good progress.
- Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students of all abilities are interested and motivated to learn, and they ask questions when they feel that they do not understand the work.
- Behaviour is excellent, as are teacher-student relationships. A relatively high proportion of students consider that they make good progress in geography.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching is good.

- The quality of teaching is always good and sometimes outstanding. Common strengths of the teaching include:
 - the use of learning objectives and success criteria, so that students know what they are expected to learn
 - the high quality of questions used which require students to analyse and evaluate information and ideas, and enable teachers to assess their progress
 - a well planned variety of learning activities that are effectively managed so that time is used very efficiently
 - a focus on students' understanding and use of geographical vocabulary through, for example, paired discussions
 - the development of students' thinking skills.
- Occasionally, teachers provide opportunities for students to develop their enquiry skills, but opportunities are sometimes missed to help students take more responsibility for their own learning.
- Some aspects of assessment are used very effectively to help students make good progress with their learning. For example, teachers use questions to both develop students' learning and also check their knowledge and understanding. Increasingly, students are assessing their own work against agreed criteria.
- Students' work is regularly marked although teachers' comments are rarely specific about how they should improve their geographical knowledge and skills.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- A new scheme of work is being piloted with Year 7. This is satisfactory but is not based on a clear progression in geographical skills and does not include geography's contribution to the themes of work related learning and community cohesion. Education for sustainable development is a strong feature of the good schemes of work for Years 8 and 9.
- The good GCSE scheme of work includes clear learning objectives and success criteria together with possible teaching activities.
- There is good fieldwork provision in each year group, including Year 11. Information communication technology (ICT) is used to enhance students' learning in geography, including the use of geographical information systems.
- The school has sports and ICT specialist status and this has a good impact on the geography curriculum.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- The outstanding self-evaluation by the senior leadership team and the head of geography is rigorous and accurate.
- Leadership for the development of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum is satisfactory.
- The geography department has a good track record of improvement. For example, boys made more progress than girls in the 2007 GCSE geography and the department took effective action to improve girls' progress for the 2008 exams.
- Effective improvements have also been made to the use of questions and thinking skills in lessons, and the use of very challenging targets for individual students.
- Teachers in the department work effectively as a team and have contributed to some important whole-school improvements. Consequently, there is a good capacity for further improvement in geography.
- The geography teachers have benefited from a very good range of opportunities for continuing professional development using school-based and external courses, as well as those provided through its training school status. These are having a good impact on the leadership and management of geography, and the quality of teaching and learning.

Subject issue

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

- Opportunities for students to develop their understanding of community cohesion are not yet included in geography schemes of work.
- Lessons help to develop a good understanding of the lives of people from different backgrounds and cultures through, for example, study of migration from Mexico to USA and an understanding of the difference between more economically developed and less economically developed countries.
- Although students learn about the diversity of communities around the world, there is limited learning about the diversity of communities within Britain. However, students have a good understanding of the processes of migration into Britain.
- Students learn about the dangers of stereotyped images of people and countries through the use of a limited range of evidence.
- The geography department contributes positively to the annual visit to Kenya which typically involves twenty five students. Claverham supports a Kenyan primary school in a number of practical ways, including the provision of a solar powered lighting system.
- In Year 7, students study the school's locality and they gain a good understanding of sustainable development in Years 8 and 9. However, the geography curriculum does not encourage them sufficiently to consider their roles and responsibilities as citizens within these contexts.

Areas for improvement

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

- create more opportunities for students to become more independent learners
- ensure that marking helps students to understand how to improve their geographical knowledge, understanding and skills
- develop, within the Key Stage 3 schemes of work, a clear progression in students' geographical skills and better opportunities for understanding of community cohesion.

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