

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 0207 421 6855  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



09 December 2008

Mr Steele  
Headteacher  
Sherburn High School  
Garden Lane  
Sherburn-in-Elmet  
Leeds  
West Yorkshire  
LS25 6AS

Dear Mr Steele

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 24 and 25 November 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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of data, analysis of pupils' work and observation of seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Students enter the school with broadly average standards. The relative weaknesses which typically exist in students' knowledge of places and in their enquiry skills are addressed well. Consequently, boys and girls of all abilities make generally good progress from their starting points across Key Stages 3 and 4.

- Standards are above average by the end of Year 9, Year 11 and Year 13. This is reflected in the results of external examinations, which are rising, particularly at GCSE level.
- On average, students do significantly better in GCSE geography examinations than in their other subjects. However, there is some underachievement in Key Stage 4 which is directly related to the quality of teaching that a minority of students receive.
- The subject is very popular. Much higher proportions of students than is the case nationally choose to follow examination courses in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.
- On the whole, students enjoy their lessons a great deal; they behave well and work productively and co-operatively together. They acquire the study skills and confidence to be able to learn independently and to express their views and opinions. This is reflected, for example, in the good quality of the coursework they produce for GCSE.

### Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Lessons are planned effectively and build well in most cases on the information gathered about students' attainment and their learning needs.
- Learning activities are varied and, on the whole, engaging. Teachers recognise the importance of involving students in their learning. Hence, they often use group work and investigations to promote good progress.
- Students develop an interest in geography because, typically, teachers make the subject relevant and share their enthusiasm for learning. In an outstanding example in Year 11, students were wholly absorbed in sharing and evaluating their 'expert' opinions about the causes and effects of earthquake activity.
- In most lessons, there is a good match between planned activities and students' needs. Where this does not occur, students find the activities too complex, their interest is not engaged and they lapse concentration, resulting in inadequate progress.
- The marking of work and the feedback given to students is a strong feature and contributes well to the good progress that students make.
- Teachers strive hard in various ways to involve students in understanding how well they are doing. Students are very appreciative of the good quality guidance that they receive to enable them to reach their targets.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- Schemes of work are well planned and contribute well to students' progress.
- There is a clear emphasis on promoting enjoyment and ensuring that topics are made relevant and reflect contemporary evidence.
- The curriculum is kept under review and adapted well to meet students changing needs. For example, a new examination course has been introduced into Year 12 to strengthen fieldwork and to promote faster progress, particularly among the lower attaining students who enter the sixth form.
- The flexibility offered by changes to the National Curriculum requirements at Key Stage 3 has been positively embraced. Students in Year 7 have thoroughly enjoyed learning the new topic of the 'Seven Wonders of the World' and say that it has extended their understanding of what the subject is about.
- The department recognises that the current opportunities to learn outside of the classroom and to develop practical fieldwork skills during Key Stage 3 are insufficient.
- Enrichment opportunities are at an early stage of development. There are currently no clubs or extra-curricular activities on offer. Whilst ICT is frequently used for classwork, it is little used to support and enrich students' experience outside of normal lessons.

### Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- The department is led purposefully. There is a clear vision established for the nature of learning in the subject which is embraced by all members of the team.
- The subject team have high expectations which enable challenging targets to be set for students' progress.
- The data held on students' attainment which is gathered from a well-conceived and accurate assessment system is used effectively to monitor their progress. Consequently, students receive prompt attention and tailored additional support if they begin to slip behind.
- Monitoring and evaluation of the department's work is robust. This enables appropriate priorities for improvement to be clearly identified and the progress with their implementation checked.

### Subject issue

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

- An initial audit of the provision made by the department has been undertaken which has raised awareness of the contribution that is being made.

- The department knows its students well and understands the nature of the communities from which they are drawn.
- Lessons are typically harmonious and relationships between students and with their teachers are very good. Students acquire positive values towards people and societies with different characteristics to their own.
- The curriculum has been effectively planned so that students learn progressively about communities in different regional, national and global settings. However, there are no existing links with schools in different circumstances either at home or abroad to enhance students' learning.

#### Areas for improvement

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

- ensure that all teaching is of, at least, a consistently satisfactory quality so that all groups of students make the progress expected in relation to their prior attainment
- extend fieldwork opportunities at Key Stage 3
- enrich the curriculum further by developing the use of ICT and by extending opportunities for students to engage in geographical learning outside of normal lessons.

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

Ralph Higgs  
Additional Inspector