

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Ms S Japp
Headteacher
Beverley High School
Norwood
Beverley
East Riding of Yorkshire
HU17 9EX

Dear Ms Japp

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 16 and 17 September 2009, 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 assessing 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 parts of seven lessons in Key Stages 3 and 4 and the sixth form.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is good.

- Students enter the school with standards that are well above average in geography. They make good progress to achieve standards that are very high. In 2009, all students achieved grades A* to C at GCSE.
- Students also achieve high standards and make good progress in the sixth form, where there is joint provision with Beverley Grammar School.

- The best progress is made by lower attaining students who receive one-to-one support and middle attaining students who are presented with very high levels of challenge.
- Geography lessons help students to develop good literacy and numeracy skills, although there are insufficient opportunities for them to practise their skills of extended writing.
- Students have a good understanding of the places chosen for particular case studies, but have weaker knowledge and understanding of wider locational geography.
- Geography makes a good contribution to students' personal development. Fieldwork and other arranged visits contribute particularly well to their social and moral development.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching in geography is good.

- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and structure their lessons well. Their classroom management and skills of organisation are also strong. Students value the way that these aspects of teaching improve their confidence and help them to organise their own work efficiently.
- Teachers know their students well. Relationships in the classroom between teachers and students, and among students, are positive.
- Teachers use a satisfactory range of teaching and learning styles which includes paired work, role-play and group decision making.
- Insufficient use is made of information and communication technology for learning but it is used well for teaching.
- Students' work is marked regularly, although comments sometimes lack detailed geography-specific information about the next steps in learning. Students receive good oral feedback to support their progress.
- Teachers do not use assessment information and students' target grades sufficiently to inform their planning or to ensure that tasks meet the needs of all students.

Quality of curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum plans ensure that required areas are covered and identify the approaches and resources to be used. However, they do not focus sufficiently on assessment, key skills, students' preferred learning styles or the match of tasks to students' attainment.
- The department has made an appropriate start in developing new schemes of work to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum and new examination syllabuses. For example, more attention has been given to helping students to understand the changes in population make up within the region.

- The planning for Key Stage 3 does not give sufficient consideration to students' experiences and achievements in primary school, or take account of the increased emphasis on topical issues and extending their experiences.
- Fieldwork days enrich the curriculum and are particularly effective in the sixth form. Students enjoy these events greatly and are aware of how they extend their knowledge and understanding of geography.
- The department's approach to fieldwork is inclusive.
- The geography curriculum is enhanced by whole-school initiatives which include partnerships; local, regional and international links; and opportunities for the students to explore their interest in fair trade, ecology and sustainability.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is satisfactory and shows good capacity for further improvement.

- Subject leadership provides a clear vision for continued improvement that is translated well into departmental development planning.
- The monitoring and evaluation of standards, achievement and provision are developing. There is some limited scrutiny of work and gathering of students' views, leading to an improved understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the department.
- Lesson observations are undertaken appropriately for performance management but are not routinely used to evaluate teaching and learning.
- Students who are underachieving receive appropriate individual interventions, particularly in Key Stage 4.
- Teachers clearly keep their subject knowledge up to date but, in doing so, make insufficient use of the resources and training provided by the subject associations.

Subject issues

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

- Whole-school initiatives are not yet fully integrated into the daily work of the geography department so that all students benefit.
- At subject leadership level there is a very good understanding of what is needed to raise the profile of community cohesion through the subject. However, the department has not analysed sufficiently well how its provision and students' developing geographical skills and understanding might contribute to this.
- Opportunities for role-play and decision making in lessons help students to understand their roles and responsibilities as active citizens.

- The focus on developing students' thinking skills is giving them the confidence to raise questions about issues that concern them.

Areas for improvement

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

- make better use of attainment data to match tasks to students' needs
- develop students' wider locational knowledge and their understanding of national and global diversity
- develop schemes of work that give students greater breadth of experience and place more emphasis on assessment, key skills and students' preferred learning styles
- increase the range and frequency of monitoring in order to inform future practice.

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

Sonya Williamson
Her Majesty's Inspector