

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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Mr J Echevarria
Headteacher
St Augustine's RC School
Sandybed Lane
Stepney Hill
Scarborough
YO12 5LH

Dear Mr Echevarria

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 30 September and 1 October 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 focused 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is satisfactory overall.

- Standards at Key Stage 4 are improving. However, results fluctuate from year to year reflecting variations in the potential of the students and the very small numbers opting for the subject at GCSE.
- Results peaked in 2009, with standards well above national levels. This represented good progress by many students. Projections suggest that these standards will be difficult to maintain over the next few years. They will, however, be in line with predictions for the cohorts of students entered for the examination.

- Boys continue to underachieve in comparison to girls. Apart from in 2009, few students attain the higher grades at GCSE.
- Focused support and intervention strategies for GCSE students have led to improving standards. The small numbers of students in examination classes, as well as improved identification of underperformance, have made this possible. This is less evident in the larger classes at Key Stage 3.
- At Key Stage 3, both standards and achievement are satisfactory. However, work in books identifies that students, particularly the more able, have few opportunities to complete more challenging tasks which develop their thinking.
- Relationships in most lessons are good. Students enjoy opportunities to work collaboratively, discover for themselves and discuss relevant issues. Tasks set do not enable them to learn in this way frequently enough.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching is satisfactory.

- Teaching approaches are functional and often teacher dominated. These ensure that topics are covered but many activities occupy students rather than challenging their thinking or developing real understanding.
- There is often an over-reliance on one text book which limits teaching and learning strategies. Tasks set do not challenge the most able in particular.
- Work in books shows little evidence that students' understanding develops as they progress through a key stage. There are few opportunities to write in a variety of genres, research information or work collaboratively on an extended piece of work. On those few occasions when this happened, such as when students explored fair trade issues, they talked positively about their experiences.
- The approach being tried to make homework at Key Stage 3 more challenging is innovative. The range of tasks set encourages students to aim higher. This is at an early stage of development but has the potential to really engage students in their learning, provided they receive clear guidance about what is expected as the outcome.
- Information and communication technology is used to support some teacher exposition. However, it is used less effectively to model how students could access a task. Instructions are often oral and are not always clear which can lead to confusion about expected outcomes.
- Marking varies. Homework and assessment tasks are generally well managed. However, day to day marking of class work is weak with few comments to inform students on how to improve. Lower ability students, in particular, become de-motivated if they do not receive regular guidance.
- Assessment systems are in place but, as yet, are not based firmly on precise outcomes. There are no moderated exemplars of work at Key

Stage 3 against which students' work can be accurately measured and which can inform their progress more effectively.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- The curriculum overview at Key Stage 3 provides a framework that meets statutory coverage. A good range of countries and localities is studied. However, several units of work remain incomplete or have not yet been planned.
- There is too great a focus on factual coverage and an over-reliance on a narrow range of resources, notably text books. Currently, there is little evidence that the curriculum planning allows students progressively to build up their skills and understanding in geography.
- Fieldwork is being introduced into the Key Stage 3 programme. Students talk positively about the opportunity to learn outside the classroom during their visit to Malton. However, fieldwork is not yet part of a sequence of opportunities which build up students' expertise and skills.
- At Key Stage 4, the GCSE syllabus provides a framework that ensures coverage of examination requirements. There is no scheme of work in place to support this.
- Fieldwork visits to Robin Hood's Bay and Manchester provide good opportunities for students to develop fieldwork skills at GCSE. There has been a strong focus on this aspect of their work in the drive to improve standards.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is satisfactory.

- There is good analysis of examination data. This has enabled teachers to focus on weaknesses such as coursework which has helped to raise standards. The relative underachievement of boys has, however, not been addressed.
- Although monitoring procedures are in place, they are not sufficiently rigorous in evaluating the outcomes for students in terms of quality or marking of work.
- Strategic planning has not been sufficiently focused on improving practice in the classroom.
- Preparations to implement the new Key Stage 3 curriculum and examination courses are satisfactory. However, opportunities to make the curriculum more relevant for students are patchy.
- There has been little relevant subject specific staff development. Resources and support provided by subject associations have not been utilised to improve the curriculum or learning in the classroom.

Subject issues

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

- Opportunities to support community cohesion are evident in some of the units of work but are not planned for in such a way as to progressively build up students' understanding about key concepts such as diversity, interdependence and sustainability.
- Students have a basic understanding of some local and global issues and have opportunities to study about a broad range of places. However, many still have a narrow view of the world which can lead to stereotypical misconceptions.
- Students have positive attitudes towards each other. They respect each other and different points of view. Resources are not always used to best effect to stimulate discussion and debate.
- Students from minority ethnic groups settle quickly into class and are appreciative of the support they receive in lessons.

Areas for improvement

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the quality of the provision in the classroom by:
 - ensuring that the curriculum is relevant to students and engages their interest
 - developing a range of teaching approaches which utilise a wider range of resources and challenge the students, especially the most able
 - improving marking to make feedback meaningful to students and support their learning
- utilising the resources and support provided by the subject associations to improve subject expertise as well as the quality of teaching and learning
- ensuring that planning and monitoring is focused on improving classroom 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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for the next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector