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Dr A Lee  
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Dear Dr Lee

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 7 and 8 December 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of data; analysis of students' work; learning walks around the school and the observation of four lessons. One of these was a joint observation.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

#### Achievement in geography

Achievement is good.

- Students enter the school with a wide range of abilities and a variety of different geographical experiences.
- By the end of Key Stage 3, all students make good progress to attain standards in line with national expectations in geography.

- Small numbers of students select to study geography at GCSE. The majority of students make expected progress and achieve their target grades at Key Stage 4. Useful strategies are in place to eradicate underachievement among some students for whom English is an additional language.
- Attainment in the sixth form fluctuates dependent upon the cohort and the number of students opting to take geography. Overall, students make good progress and the school has a tradition of students going on to study the subject at university.
- Students acquire appropriate skills and a wide range of knowledge and understanding about geography from the interesting classroom activities and fieldwork projects they are involved in.
- Geography makes a good contribution to students' personal development.

### Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching of geography is good.

- Geography is taught as a discrete subject by two subject specialists. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are enthusiastic about teaching geography. All of the teaching observed during the visit was satisfactory or good.
- Lessons are planned and organised well. However, the heavily guided structure of some lessons does not always encourage independent learning or offer sufficient challenge for the most able students.
- In the good lessons, students make good progress because sessions are planned in detail to ensure they complete interesting tasks with understanding and at a good pace. There are good levels of interaction and students are actively involved in their own learning.
- In satisfactory lessons, work is not matched precisely enough to students' learning needs. This results in a lack of challenge and students do not make as much progress as they should.
- Teachers know their students well. All students speak highly of the geography department, the variety of work they are engaged in and the support and help they receive in their learning.
- The school has a good range of geographical resources and appropriate use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching and learning.
- There are inconsistencies in the quality of marking and feedback. Students' work is marked regularly, but comments sometimes lack detailed geography-specific information about the next steps in learning.
- End of unit assessments are used accurately to level students' performance and set targets for further development.
- Teachers do not always use the available assessment information and students' target grades sufficiently to inform their planning or to ensure

that tasks meet the needs of all students and maximise their learning in geography.

### Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is good.

- During this period of curriculum transition at Key Stage 3, GCSE and A-level changes are being managed well.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum has been successfully modified in line with current requirements. Interesting topics and themes, such as conflict diamonds, have been developed which are topical and relevant to students and have been designed to promote discussion and develop opinion.
- Detailed attention is paid to the development of students' literacy and map-work skills.
- Appropriate fieldwork opportunities are provided at each key stage. Students enjoy these events and are aware of how they extend their knowledge and understanding of geography.
- Classroom displays are used effectively to celebrate the curriculum and students' growing knowledge and understanding of the world.

### Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- The geography department is led and managed well. Some opportunities are taken to keep abreast of current developments in the subject and to exchange ideas with others. For example, the department has provided support for a local middle school to develop its work on Fairtrade. More effective use could be made of subject-association resources and local networks to exchange ideas and practice.
- Self-evaluation is accurate. The department has recently been awarded the Secondary Geography Quality Mark. An appropriate range of formal and informal monitoring and evaluation takes place. As a result, there is a detailed understanding of what needs to be done to improve the department further.
- The school demonstrates a good capacity to improve its work in geography.

### Subject issue

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

- Community cohesion is supported very well by the geography department and is delivered effectively through the broad geography curriculum.

- The department places a great emphasis on the importance of diversity and inclusion at a school, local, national and international scale and geography has a positive influence on students' attitudes and values.
- Students gain a good understanding of their own school and local community and are able to use this understanding to make appropriate comparisons with other more distant communities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- making better use of assessment information to inform planning and matching tasks to meet the needs of groups of students more precisely in geography
- improving the levels of challenge to maximise learning in geography, particularly for the most able
- improving the consistency of feedback on students' written work to ensure it informs them how to improve their work in geography
- making more effective use of the resources and professional advice offered by subject associations and local geography networks to support departmental improvements and share best 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

Angela Milner  
Her Majesty's Inspector