

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



28 October 2009

Mrs V Angus
Headteacher
Reading Girls' School
Northumberland Avenue
Reading
Berkshire
RG2 7PY

Dear Mrs Angus

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 19 and 20 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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is satisfactory.

- The GCSE examination results improved considerably in 2008 and this improvement was sustained in 2009. Attainment at GCSE is now in line with the national average for geography. Given their starting points, overall students make satisfactory progress. Students currently in Year 11 are on course to maintain this level of performance.

- Standards at the end of Year 9 have recently been in line with national expectations.
- The current Year 9 are making good progress and are attaining standards that are above average. They demonstrate effective learning through well-constructed pieces of extended writing where, for example, they explain and evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of processes such as globalisation.
- The focus on establishing basic place knowledge in Year 7 is successful as most students can recall simple facts about places. Mapwork at a range of scales is accurately completed.
- Students enjoy geography and feel engaged in their learning. They appreciate the well-structured and organised lessons and the broad range of activities they get involved in. As a result of the teaching, there are positive relationships between the staff and students and behaviour is good.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching is good.

- Teachers plan their lessons in detail and ensure that what they intend students to learn is made explicit to them at the start of the lesson. Data on student performance is available to staff but this is not yet used in a systematic way to inform planning.
- Teachers deploy a good range of strategies that effectively promote learning. Through their planning they ensure that there is a suitable balance of independent learning and groupwork.
- There are regular opportunities for the formal assessment of students' learning and this is linked effectively to the target setting and monitoring system. As a result, students know their targets and what they have to do to improve.
- Marking of students' work is undertaken regularly and provides clear guidance informing students of how they can improve. The quality of assessment in lessons is more variable.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- The curriculum for Key Stage 3 is broad and balanced and provides students with a range of learning experiences that cover the required concepts and skills.

- Schemes of work are in place. However, they do not explicitly show how the concepts and skills are progressively built up across the key stage and assessment is not a feature of these plans.
- The department has made an appropriate start to the development and implementation of the new GCSE specification.
- There is too little fieldwork in Key Stage 3 so students do not have the opportunity to progressively develop their practical geography skills. There are appropriate opportunities for students to undertake fieldwork at GCSE and students enjoys these experiences.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- The head of department has a clear vision for geography and a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the subject which are reflected in the self-evaluation and development plans.
- There is good monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning through regular lesson observation and scrutiny of students' work. The systematic gathering of students' views is less developed.
- Effective leadership of the department has resulted in a significant increase in the numbers of students opting to study geography in the last two years.
- There have been good opportunities for subject-specific staff development in support of the new GCSE examination. The school is aware of the Action Plan for Geography and support that subject associations can provide.

Subject issues

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

- The head of department has a good understanding of how geography contributes to the school's work on promoting community cohesion and how it can support students' understanding of this.
- There are regular opportunities within the geography curriculum for students to study issues related to diversity, culture, sustainability and interdependence, often through a range of places.
- The students, particularly those in Year 9 and above, demonstrate a good understanding and empathy of the need to value others, their place in the world and the impact they have. They are aware of their own identity and what this means in a multi-cultural society and speak confidently and openly about this.

Areas for improvement

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- using data to inform planning so that learning activities are more precisely matched to the abilities of the students
- developing the use of assessment to support learning within lessons
- ensuring there are sufficient fieldwork opportunities at Key Stage 3 so as to meet the requirements of the geography National Curriculum.

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

Paul Dowgill
Additional Inspector