

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



6 November 2009

Mr G Turner
Headteacher
Bedale High School
Fitzalan Road
Bedale
North Yorkshire
DL8 2EQ

Dear Mr Turner

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 3 and 4 November 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 included: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of data; analysis of students' work; and observation of eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory with some aspects that are good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is satisfactory overall.

- On entry to the school, students' geographical knowledge and understanding varies greatly. They do, however, exhibit good spatial awareness and knowledge of where places are.
- At Key Stage 3, students make satisfactory progress overall. They use geographical vocabulary with confidence and have good geographical knowledge. Geographical skills are less well developed due to restricted

opportunities for fieldwork and a limited focus on the use of maps or geographical data.

- Despite a dip in 2009, standards at Key Stage 4 are consistently above the national average. Less able and middle-ability students generally make good progress. The most able, however, only make satisfactory progress.
- Relationships are very good. Students enjoy geography with double the national average opting to take the subject at GCSE. They particularly enjoy the increasingly frequent opportunities to work collaboratively.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching is satisfactory.

- The team of specialist geography teachers has good subject knowledge. Although some good and outstanding teaching was observed there is variability across the department.
- The best teaching uses a range of visual stimuli effectively to engage with students. A variety of teaching approaches enables them to work collaboratively and become actively involved in their learning.
- Weaker teaching tends to occupy students rather than engage them. The pace is often leisurely with little work produced, some of which may be left incomplete.
- Very good use is made in many lessons of innovative and engaging starter activities. These engage and enthral students. However, where instructions are oral, students sometimes have difficulty in accessing tasks to enable them to respond in greater depth. Where access is well modelled, students are able to produce higher-quality responses.
- Tasks set provide few opportunities to stretch the most able students. There are limited opportunities to write in a variety of genres. Questions set often require short or low-level responses and there is limited opportunity for individual enquiry.
- Information and communication technology is used regularly by teachers to support exposition. Film clips and simulations are used frequently to stimulate students' interest. The internet is often used as a resource although geographical information systems (GIS) are underdeveloped.
- Students' work is marked regularly and increasingly effective use is being made of self and peer assessment to support learning. Students are aware of targets and receive good guidance on how to improve their work.
- GCSE students receive well focused and additional support, for example through additional revision sessions, to raise their performance.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- Schemes of work are currently under review and changes are being implemented to meet the new requirements at both GCSE and Key Stage 3. An increasing focus on sustainability is being integrated into new units.
- The quality of modules varies. Some provide detailed guidance which incorporates a range of teaching approaches and recommends a variety of resources which could be used; others focus too much on factual coverage rather than learning opportunities.
- The European dimension is poorly developed. Students have few opportunities to enhance their understanding of the diversity of issues which will impact on their lives as citizens of Europe.
- The embryonic links with schools in contrasting localities, such as Morocco, provide a good opportunity for students to develop their understanding of a wider range of localities and contrasting cultures.
- There are limited opportunities for students to develop geographical skills through fieldwork at Key Stage 3. Students have more opportunities at GCSE where they are able to visit Iceland to study tectonics and, more locally, York where they complete research on settlements.
- Geography supports the humanities specialism well through dissemination of assessment for learning strategies and teaching and learning approaches through the Activate programme. Wider involvement through the International Schools Award and with the local school community is planned to disseminate good practice and develop networks to promote geography.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

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

- The subject leader has a clear vision for the development of the subject linked to the humanities specialism. Strong foundations have been created on which the subject can be developed and improved.
- Plans to turn the school into a 'hub' of geographical excellence to support the development of geography in the local area are ambitious. This is currently a work in progress.
- The department knows and understands its strengths and weaknesses well. Thorough self-evaluation has been central to the changes being initiated.
- Geography is undergoing a period of change with a movement away from more formal approaches to teaching and curriculum planning. There is a decreasing reliance on text books. Resources are currently adequate.
- Systems to monitor students' progress are in place. The department makes good use of a wide range of data to identify students in danger of underachieving and this enables appropriate support strategies to be put into place.
- Subject-focused weekly meetings have been established recently to support and drive improvements in the subject and remedy the long-time

shortage of subject-specific professional development. The help and support provided by subject associations have not been used.

Subject issues

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

- Promotion of community cohesion is evident in some modules of work. Students have opportunities to study development, interdependence, equality and increasingly sustainability. However, as yet, this does not progressively build up their understanding of related issues.
- In lessons, there is a strong focus on providing information rather than discussion and the development of thinking. Students' responses are often short and do not provide many opportunities to express opinions or consider other points of view in detail. Students have limited opportunities to explore relevant and topical issues such as poverty, for example, in greater depth.
- Relationships in lessons are excellent. The increasing emphasis on more interactive teaching approaches encourages collaboration and students respect and support each other well.
- Students have a basic understanding of local and global issues but have little opportunity to develop their knowledge and understanding of the European community. Links with schools in contrasting localities are at an early stage of development.

Areas for improvement

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

- complete schemes of learning to include European exemplars and more relevant topical issues
- develop a fieldwork programme at Key Stage 3 to encourage the progressive development of geographical skills
- stretch the more able students by developing their independent thinking and enquiry skills and by providing more frequent opportunities to write extensively in a variety of genres
- make more effective use of the support and guidance provided by subject associations to develop the subject and broaden teachers' expertise.

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