

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



17 November 2009

Mr P Loftus
Associate Headteacher
Norton College
Langton Road
Norton
Malton
YO17 9PT

Dear Mr Loftus

Ofsted 2009-10 survey inspection programme: geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 10 and 11 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; learning walks around the school; and observation of five lessons in Key Stages 3, 4 and 5.

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 geographical experiences.
- By the end of Key Stage 3, all students make good progress to achieve standards in line with national expectations in geography.

- Attainment at Key Stage 4 shows a three-year-trend of continuous improvement from 2006 to 2008. Geography results dipped in 2009. A detailed analysis has taken place and appropriate actions have been put in place to tackle the issues raised. Inspection evidence confirms students are currently making good progress at Key Stage 4.
- Students also make good progress in the sixth form. Sixth-form provision is in its second year of operation. The college runs its own GCE geography course for one group of students and another group is taught in partnership with Malton School. Attainment is in line with national expectations and retention rates from AS to A2 level are excellent for both groups of students.
- Students are enthused and engaged by the collaborative learning opportunities provided in geography lessons. They develop a very good range of learning and study skills as a result.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching is good.

- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and are enthusiastic about teaching geography. All of the geography teaching observed during the visit was good and some was outstanding.
- Lesson planning is detailed. Lessons are structured very well, build on previous learning and extend students' thinking. Teachers continually check on students' learning in lessons and, when necessary, respond to support or extend this.
- Good support from the special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator and teaching assistants helps those students with additional needs to participate fully in lessons.
- Teachers know their students well. Relationships in the classroom between teachers and students, and among students, are positive. All students speak highly of the geography department and the variety of work they are engaged in.
- The school has a good range of geographical resources and effective use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching and learning. Further development work is planned to make greater use of Geographical Information Systems (GIS).
- Assessment is accurate. End-of-unit assessments are planned carefully, marked in great detail and provide good guidance to students. Students are actively involved in assessing their own and others' work.
- There is less evidence of more regular marking of students' geography notes to pick up on errors or to provide evidence of when feedback has been given in other forms. The department is currently working to redress this balance and provide more immediate feedback to students in line with the school's policy.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

- During this period of curriculum transition at Key Stage 3, GCSE and A level, changes are being managed very well.
- The geography curriculum provides an excellent range of opportunities for students to investigate topical issues. These engage students' interest with issues linked to poverty, development, sustainability and the impact of natural disasters, as well as a broad range of physical, human and environmental geography.
- There are good links with other humanities subjects and with the science department. Detailed attention is paid to the development of students' literacy, thinking and learning skills.
- The geography department's schemes of work are continually adapted and refined. Units of work are sequenced very carefully to ensure continuity and progression in learning and the acquisition of a comprehensive range of geographical skills, knowledge and understanding.
- Collaborative planning of curriculum units and lessons leads to the production of detailed lesson plans; high-quality, up-to-date resources; and a series of meaningful and motivating learning experiences in geography. These resources are adapted extremely well by individual teachers to meet the needs of different groups of students.
- Good fieldwork opportunities are provided at each key stage. Students enjoy these events greatly and are aware of how they extend their knowledge and understanding of geography.
- ICT is embedded in the geography curriculum. Very effective use is made of a portal for home learning to consolidate and challenge students' learning through a number of well-devised extended tasks.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is outstanding.

- Geography is a popular and successful subject in the college. Subject leadership is conscientious and committed. There is a positive vision for the future of the subject and the department continually strives to improve the quality of provision and students' learning and attainment.
- The cohesive and enthusiastic geography team is led and managed well. Teachers work to their strengths and willingly lead new initiatives in the subject, which benefit the work of the humanities faculty and the college.
- Self-evaluation is accurate. 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.

- A particular strength of the department is the way it makes extensive use of the resources and professional advice offered by subject associations, the local authority and local network groups to support improvements within the college.

Subject issue

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

- Community cohesion is supported extremely well by the geography department and is delivered effectively through the broad geography curriculum and well-planned and integrated cross-curricular thematic days.
- The department makes very effective use of links with a school in Sri Lanka to enhance learning in geography throughout the curriculum.
- The department places great emphasis on the importance of diversity and inclusion at a college, local, national and international scale, and geography has a positive influence on students' attitudes and values.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the use of regular feedback on students' work to maximise learning in geography
- developing the use of GIS throughout the college.

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