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Mrs L Duncan  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Duncan

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 23 and 24 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.

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 three full lessons and parts of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement is good.

- The proportion of students attaining A\* to C grades at GCSE is broadly average and is improving year on year. Not enough students attain the highest grades.
- Most students meet or exceed the challenging targets set for them and make good progress given their starting points.

- The progress students make in lessons is good. They demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of a range of places, physical and human processes and environmental issues.
- Older students undertake independent work effectively and demonstrate an improving application of a range of geographical skills within their work.
- Students are enthusiastic about geography, especially the way it helps them understand the world. This is reflected in the good numbers who opt to study geography at GCSE.
- Students' behaviour in geography is exemplary, as demonstrated in their willingness to be actively involved in their learning, listen carefully to their peers and sensibly assess each other's work. This supports their good progress.

#### Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching is good.

- Teachers plan lessons with clear learning outcomes in mind and organise the learning activities to ensure that objectives are met.
- A broad range of active learning strategies is employed by all staff in the department and students appreciate the opportunities to be involved in their learning through strategies such as role-play.
- Lessons are well-structured and resourced. In particular, good use is made of the interactive whiteboard to present relevant and topical issues and access up-to-date visual materials.
- Assessment is a strength in the department. In lessons, a good range of strategies including self- and peer-assessment is used to consider the quality of students' work. Students readily accept critical feedback and know their target grades and what they have to do to attain these.
- Marking is undertaken regularly and is helpful in ensuring students understand what they have to do to improve.

#### Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is broad and balanced and is reviewed and updated regularly. A number of contemporary themes are taught. The curriculum is underpinned by detailed schemes of work with assessment effectively built into each unit.
- The new specification adopted at Key Stage 4 provides good opportunities for relevant and exciting geography to be delivered. This is already evident through the teaching of a unit on population.

- There are good, inclusive opportunities for fieldwork in each year group. At Key Stage 3, these are used well to develop students' skills in preparation for GCSE.
- The virtual learning environment is developing well and allows students to access the curriculum outside of school.

### Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- The head of geography has a clear vision for the subject, knows where the strengths lie and what requires improvement. The geography staff are an effective team who complement each other well and are committed to improving the geographical experiences for the students.
- There are good systems in place for monitoring the work of the department through lesson observation and work scrutiny. Examination results are carefully analysed with a focus on the performance of different groups.
- Access to geography-specific professional development, both examinations focused and more general, is good. Effective use is made of the materials available from the subject associations.
- The department plays a full role in the humanities specialism and leads on key areas of teaching and learning.

### Subject issue

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

- The teaching staff have a good understanding of how geography contributes to the promotion of community cohesion. There are a number of curriculum units that specifically focus on aspects of community cohesion, although this is not explicitly mapped in the schemes of work.
- The focus of the teaching ensures that students have a good understanding of sustainability and demonstrate empathy for different cultures. They also are aware of a range of issues from the local to the global scale.
- A major focus of the humanities specialism is developing community cohesion and students' understanding of this, for example, through themes days and weeks. Geography plays a full part in these initiatives.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the proportion of students attaining the highest grades
- ensuring that key geographical concepts and skills are carefully mapped across the schemes of work, formal assessments and fieldwork activities so that the increasing challenge in each year is explicit

- developing the use of geographical information systems to support students' learning both in and outside the classroom.

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