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Mrs E Sims
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Sims

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 included: interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of data, analysis of students' work and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement is good.

- Students enter the school with standards in geography that are around the national average. A significantly higher number of students have a statement of special educational need than the national average.
- Good progress is made throughout Key Stage 3, with students broadening their knowledge and understanding of geographical processes and places. They build upon early enquiry skills and are able to undertake independent research. The greatest rate of progress is made by higher-achieving

students who are less hindered by lower literacy levels. By Year 9 examples of well-crafted extended writing are in evidence across the ability range.

- Some students in Years 7 and 8 do not make sufficient use of correct geographical terminology, but this improves in Key Stage 4.
- Good progress continues through Key Stage 4, which has resulted in slightly higher than national average GCSE results for the last four years.
- By Year 11, good enquiry-based skills are developed progressively and mature independent note-taking skills are evident, allowing students to retrieve information effectively for revision purposes.
- Students understand how well they are doing and are keen to know the level that they have reached. They genuinely seek to improve these levels.
- Students work well together and behaviour in lessons is good. Geography lessons make a positive contribution to their personal development. Students' understanding of their personal responsibilities as citizens is good.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching is good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and lessons are planned well with a range of generally appropriate activities and tasks, although there is some variation between those teaching the subject. Classroom management is good, resulting in good behaviour.
- Teachers use a wide range of teaching strategies which are successful in promoting effective learning. However, some teachers do not always provide a clear enough explanation when introducing new topics or make explicit links between key facts.
- Students assess each other's work and make sensible suggestions as to how to improve it. Assessment becomes particularly effective when these outcomes are also checked by the teacher.
- Monitoring of students' progress is documented well and targets are set regularly.
- The quality of marking is good and students are encouraged, through the marking, to ensure that they provide full and detailed answers to questions.
- Teachers make good use of the interactive whiteboard in classrooms to create a stimulating visual learning environment. Access is provided for students to use computers directly. However, access to Google Earth is at present prohibited by the local authority learning platform, which limits the use of geographical information systems (GIS).
- Good support is offered through revision and coursework clubs to ensure students receive additional guidance for their GCSE examination.

- A testament to the good quality teaching is the continuing popularity of geography at Key Stage 4.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum plans and schemes of work are thorough and detailed and reflect current and topical ideas and concepts, such as globalisation of world trade, sustainability and climate change.
- Schemes of work also identify progression in knowledge and understanding and in the development of key skills, such as geographical enquiry, graphicacy and visual literacy, which provide an excellent basis for everyday planning of lessons.
- The adoption of a new GCSE syllabus has been well thought through and should ensure that students' chances of a good GCSE are maximised.
- Fieldwork enriches the curriculum but can be an adjunct to other subjects. The Wandle Valley fieldwork in Key Stage 4 is very well developed and enables good information and communication technology (ICT) skills and enquiry-based learning to take place.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is outstanding.

- The subject leader has a passion for the subject and actively seeks to work in the broader geographical world with subject specific professional organisations and national bodies.
- The subject leader also offers continuing professional development in geography to local primary and secondary schools, while the teachers in the department make good use of professional development opportunities themselves.
- Monitoring and evaluation is established well within the department and across the school. They are used effectively to promote and improve geography provision and students' outcomes. In particular, the views of students are regularly sought ensuring that the subject constantly refreshes itself.
- Students' books are scrutinised effectively across the department and by senior leaders in the school on a regular basis. Lesson observations are perceptive and used to improve the quality of teaching.
- A clear subject development plan has been produced which aligns with the whole-school development plan. A detailed subject evaluation pulls together a considerable amount of information, providing a good basis for further development.

Subject issue

The effectiveness of geography teaching and the curriculum in promoting community cohesion is good and is supported well by the school's Christian ethos.

- The department encourages pair and groupwork to foster cooperation in the classroom and sets high expectations for students, encouraging them in their aspirations.
- Curriculum links to the local planning department have been fostered. This, together with the study of Fair Trade and the professional support of geography in local schools, contributes well to community cohesion.
- The geography curriculum is underpinned by three themes in Key Stage 3; geographical impact, sustainability and interdependence. Together these themes foster an understanding of community cohesion on a global scale.

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

- encourage younger students to always use the correct geographical terminology when discussing location of places or geographical concepts and ensure they always provide fully reasoned answers to teachers' questioning
- ensure that new knowledge is always explained clearly by teachers and that explicit links in learning are made between new ideas as they are introduced
- provide further fieldwork opportunities in Key Stage 3.

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

Jenny Smith
Additional Inspector