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Mr S Haigh
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Dear Mr Haigh

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 11 and 12 January 2010 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is satisfactory overall although it is good in Key Stage 3.

- Students' geographical knowledge and understanding increase in depth and rigour as they move through the key stages, although opportunities to make links between areas of learning are missed.
- Students have good transferable key skills as a result of a successful emphasis on this by staff, but there is less emphasis on the progressive development of geographical skills.

- Students have a narrow locational knowledge and a limited understanding of the links between human and physical geography.
- Students have good information and communication technology (ICT) skills and have increasing opportunities to use them in lessons.
- Students attain broadly average standards by the end of each key stage. They make good progress overall in Key Stage 3 when work is matched well to their learning needs and interests. Learning and progress are satisfactory in Key Stage 4 where assessment information is not used sufficiently well to match tasks to students' learning needs.
- Students' personal development is very good as a result of consistently used behaviour-management strategies and positive relationships based on mutual respect.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching of geography is satisfactory overall but with some good features.

- Teachers use a very wide range of teaching and learning strategies which contributes to most students' enjoyment of geography. An above-average proportion of students chooses to study it at Key Stage 4.
- Good teaching is evident in lessons where lower-attaining students are supported appropriately and higher-attaining students suitably challenged.
- In satisfactory lessons, teachers expect students with a wide range of ability to use the same resources and complete the same tasks. They do not provide sufficient support to develop students' literacy and numeracy skills.
- Teachers often plan learning that is active and visual as well as based on speaking and listening. Good attention is given to the development of thinking skills.
- Teachers make consistent use of expected learning outcomes that are shared with students. Lessons are structured well.
- Teachers use open geographical questions well and often follow these up with additional probing questions when talking to groups of students. However, questions used in open discussion are not targeted sufficiently well to promote individual students' learning.
- Marking is regular and helpful but is focused more on completion and presentation than the next steps in geographical learning.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the geography curriculum is satisfactory.

- Schemes of work for both key stages are detailed. They are based on geographical questions well but do not make sufficiently specific reference

to how links with literacy, numeracy and ICT will enhance learning or how learning will progress from Key Stage 2.

- The curriculum is increasingly focused on topical and relevant issues, although some themes are overemphasised at the expense of others.
- Progression in skills, such as learning at a range of scales, map work and fieldwork, is not clearly planned into the curriculum.
- Fieldwork is planned at both key stages but it is not integrated well into as many units of work as it could be to support the development of students' investigative skills.
- Teachers give freely of their time to run revision sessions to tackle any potential underachievement. Planning is adhered to so that students have equality of access in all classes.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is satisfactory.

- The quality of students' work, teaching and marking, resources and displays are monitored informally through good cooperative working among the team of geography staff.
- Students' views were used well to inform the planning for curriculum change.
- Lesson observations for performance management are undertaken and evaluations of these inform improvement planning in geography.
- Assessments are planned well. Information from assessments at both key stages is analysed thoroughly to check for discrepancies between groups and identify trends.
- The subject development plan has appropriate priorities and is linked well to whole-school initiatives. However, it lacks specific measurable targets. Planned actions, although focused well on tackling underachievement, give too little attention to the formal monitoring and evaluation of provision or the evaluation of strengths and weaknesses revealed by data analysis and work scrutiny.
- The subject leader has good subject understanding and keeps up to date through links with a professional subject association. The leadership team ensures that the department is resourced well and that the curriculum is appropriate. There is good capacity for improvement.

Subject issue

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

- Thinking about community cohesion is inherent in the department. A range of planned curriculum opportunities and the use of visitors have provided suitable opportunities for students to develop their understanding

of community cohesion. These include a visit by the army to explain how they overcome cultural barriers and a joint project with the art department to promote communities within schools.

- Students have a limited awareness of differences within the UK as a result of the choice of locations for study in the curriculum.
- The curriculum gives students a satisfactory understanding of socio-economic differences, but they have a less secure understanding of cultural and ethnic differences.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- formalising the monitoring and evaluation of provision by subject leadership to inform development planning
- using assessment data more effectively to improve teaching and learning
- planning the progressive development of skills across the curriculum and broadening the range of study
- strengthening the use of literacy and numeracy strategies within the geography curriculum to support better achievement.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop geography in the school.

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

Sonya Williamson
Her Majesty's Inspector