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Mr S Packer  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Packer

Ofsted 2010-11 subject survey inspection programme: geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 20 and 21 April 2010 to look at work in geography.

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 eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is satisfactory.

- At Key Stage 3, students make satisfactory progress. Test results suggest good progress, however, significant evidence from students' work and from lesson observations suggests that progress over this key stage is satisfactory.
- Emphasis is greater on acquiring knowledge rather than developing geographical skills and understanding.
- At Key Stage 4, results over the last two years have declined and are well below the national average. However, current evidence suggests that this downward trend will be reversed in 2010, although results will still remain below the national average.

- Given students' starting points, this represents satisfactory progress. However, significant variations remain between classes. Few students attain the highest grades.
- Post-16 results fluctuate from year to year, depending on the type and size of cohort. Currently, standards are in line with national expectations.
- Boys tend to make less progress than girls, often as a result of weak literacy skills. Work set does not always challenge the more able students.
- Students' behaviour is generally satisfactory and sometimes good. However, a small number of lessons are hampered by low-level disruption. Currently, in many classes, students lack the application or skills to work collaboratively.

### Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching of geography is satisfactory overall.

- Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and use a range of resources and teaching strategies. These strategies promote a satisfactory level of learning across many aspects of the subject.
- Learning outcomes are not sufficiently high to challenge all students. Too often in lessons, all students complete the same activities irrespective of their ability. There are also variations across classes.
- In lessons, students often depend on the teacher to provide the solution rather than developing their own thinking. Independent learning skills are poorly developed.
- Good teaching was observed in the sixth form where smaller classes, greater maturity and increased independence allowed students to discuss and share ideas to develop their understanding. Lower down the school, except in Year 7, these skills, which support learning, are less evident and less well developed.
- Limited use is made of new technology, including geographical information systems, to promote learning. Teachers use technology mainly for exposition. Opportunities for students to use data and information sources, to search and select, organise and investigate and refine and present information, are more limited.
- Students get more detailed feedback through regular formal assessments but receive little constructive advice from day-to-day marking or in lessons. Use of feedback is also variable across classes.
- The monitoring of students' progress has become more sophisticated and accurate. At an early stage, the department is able to clearly identify underachieving students. The provision to support them, however, is still at an early stage of development.
- Assessment for learning techniques are used but not embedded in the culture of the classroom, except in the sixth form. Currently, these strategies have little impact on improving learning.

## Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- In Key Stage 3, the curriculum ensures general coverage of physical and human themes. Environmental themes and current issues have less prominence.
- This curriculum meets basic requirements but the focus is on coverage of content rather than the progressive development of geographical skills and concepts. The large amount of content that needs to be covered means that the planned programme is not always completed.
- The focus on content does not provide students with sufficient opportunities to study topics to a greater depth. This does not support or develop their thinking and understanding in the subject.
- The fieldwork programme is better developed in examination classes where it provides good opportunities for students to apply their geographical learning in real-life contexts. Students comment positively about these experiences.

## Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is satisfactory.

- Subject leaders have a good understanding of the strengths of the department and the need, as a matter of priority, to raise standards and the overall quality of provision.
- Current self-evaluation is not accurately informed by lesson observations or work scrutiny. Judgements are, too often, based on the identification of a certain approach rather than an evaluation of how effectively that particular strategy is improving provision.
- Regular departmental meetings are held, but, often, insufficient time is made available to focus on improving classroom practice.
- Some limited use has been made of professional development courses in geography. Impact has been piecemeal rather than sustained. The support provided by the subject associations has not been used.
- There is a commitment and desire to improve provision and certain aspects, such as monitoring of students' progress, have become more embedded into everyday practice.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the proportion of students attaining A\* to C grades, especially at the highest level, to match the national average more closely
- reviewing and revising the current Key Stage 3 curriculum to ensure that it is more relevant and that it progressively builds on students' learning

- improving learning for students in the classroom through a wider range of access and engagement strategies to provide a consistent level of challenge
- developing a culture of critical self-review for the subject which, at one level, leads to improvements in provision and, at another, leads students to becoming better learners.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website under the URN for your school. It will also be available to the team for the next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow  
Her Majesty's Inspector