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Mrs J Green
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Green

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 15 and 16 June 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is satisfactory.

- From above average starting points, students make satisfactory progress across both key stages to attain above average results at GCSE. Lower attaining students make progress at a slower rate than other groups.
- Students engage well with their learning and increasingly enjoy their lessons as they progress through the school. This is evidenced by increasing numbers of students choosing geography as a GCSE option.
- Geography makes a satisfactory contribution to students' personal development. Their moral development is good because they actively engage in discussions about their perceptions of geographical decision making.

- Students' learning is not always set in a locational context that they understand and they find it difficult to compare and contrast different places with their home region.
- Students' geographical skills, such as fieldwork and map work, are weaker than their geographical knowledge and they have difficulty linking prior learning to new concepts. Year 7 students are skilled at asking and reflecting on geographical questions.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching is satisfactory.

- Teaching is satisfactory with strengths in the engaging teaching and learning strategies that are used and the strong emphasis that is given to students' preferred learning styles.
- Teachers have good or better subject knowledge that enables them to plan lessons well around key geographical concepts and support students effectively through individual interventions.
- Teachers support students' communication skills well by giving strong emphasis to speaking and listening opportunities, the use of group presentations and videos.
- Information and communication technology is used well for teaching but teachers make more limited use of it to support students' learning or to provide opportunities for enquiry-based learning.
- Teachers do not plan sufficiently to meet the needs of different groups of students. Support for lower attaining students, particularly to develop their literacy skills, provide structure for their writing and enable them to have full access to the learning resources, is limited.
- Data about individual students' achievement are analysed well and appropriate action taken to tackle any potential underachievement. However, checks on the achievement of groups of students are limited.
- Teachers' marking is often developmental but is not sufficiently subject-specific about what steps students need to take to improve.
- Teachers use a range of geographical questions well to assess students' learning, but do not target them at individual students sufficiently and do not always probe their understanding deeply enough.
- Teachers do not always make sure that students know what learning outcomes are intended and they do not always check the progress and understanding of different groups of students during lessons.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- The curriculum provides a satisfactory balance of human, physical and environmental topics, although there is an overemphasis on factual coverage that results in more limited opportunities for topical learning.

- The curriculum provides only limited opportunities for fieldwork and the collection of first-hand evidence to help students understand the relevance of their studies.
- The schemes of work at Key Stage 3 are aptly based on key geographical questions but the areas of learning are not well sequenced to enable the progressive development of skills. Schemes do not build learning well from students' own experiences or make clear links between prior and future learning and they are not well adapted to meet the needs of different groups of students.
- The choice of Key Stage 4 syllabus meets students' needs appropriately by building well from their areas of learning in Key Stage 3 and providing opportunities for them to apply their learning.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is satisfactory.

- Improvements since the previous inspection of geography have led to better take-up of the subject at GCSE and the development of schemes of work to include improved opportunities for creativity.
- The subject leader provides good support to non-specialist teachers and ensures the provision of appropriate resources.
- Leaders and managers monitor the quality of provision adequately through a range of strategies but the purpose of monitoring is not always clear and outcomes are not always linked well to improvement planning.
- Observations of lessons and the scrutiny of students' books lack a clear focus on students' progress and learning.
- Limited use has been made of the support and training provided by the subject associations and wider opportunities to benefit from liaison with other geography departments.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that schemes of work are based on progressive and relevant learning that meets students' needs and provide increased opportunities for fieldwork
- developing teachers' planning so that the needs of all groups of students, particularly lower attaining students, are fully met
- increasing the use of assessment data and focused monitoring to identify areas for improvement
- providing professional development opportunities for the subject leader.

I hope that 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 under the URN for

your school. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Sonya Williamson
Her Majesty's Inspector