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Mr P Howarth  
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Dear Mr Howarth

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 23 and 24 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 data; analysis of students' work; and observation of eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is good.

- Overall, students make good progress in their learning as they move through the school. Standards at GCSE are high with students attaining grades which are well above the national average. A high proportion of students also attain the highest grades.
- At Key Stage 3, students gain a good understanding about a range of places, including their own locality. They develop an interest in the world around them and begin to understand the interaction between a range of places as well as the differences and similarities.
- Geographical map work and presentation skills are developed especially well. However, those students who do not opt for the subject at GCSE have little or no opportunity to acquire and use the range of fieldwork skills.

- Extended homework tasks enable all students, but especially the more able, to develop research skills and reasoned argument as well as personal initiative and independent thinking. As a result, outcomes from these tasks are higher than is often reflected in their class work.
- The greater majority of students enjoy the subject and numbers opting for GCSE are steadily increasing. Behaviour in lessons is exemplary and a positive atmosphere in classrooms encourages learning.

### Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching is good overall with some outstanding aspects.

- Teaching in most lessons is of a high standard and is consistently effective in ensuring that most students are motivated and engaged. However, a lack of differentiated approaches hampers the progress of a small minority.
- Lessons have a clear structure with an appropriate range of teaching strategies which promote good learning, especially at Key Stage 4.
- Students' interest is maintained in most lessons. However, occasionally in Key Stage 3, where the use of the textbook is overemphasised, students' lose interest.
- Teachers make good use of information and communication technology (ICT) to engage students with a range of multimedia resources. However, students have few opportunities to use ICT practically to enhance their learning in geography.
- Geographical information systems (GIS) are not used to promote learning or to enable students to select, investigate or refine geographical data and information in a practical way.
- Students' progress is monitored well through a range of tests and assignments. Extended homework tasks provide an exemplary method of challenging students. They also provide good opportunities to assess their overall progress and give good guidance on how to improve their work.
- Most work is marked regularly. Feedback is often constructive and informative. This enables students to understand what they need to do to improve. However, the quality of feedback can vary between classes.

### Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- There is good breadth to the curriculum which meets basic requirements and ensures sound coverage of a range of places and geographical concepts at Key Stages 3 and 4.
- However, the Key Stage 3 curriculum is overcrowded and lacks depth and topicality. Some topics and approaches are dated and do not fully meet students' needs.

- Although basic requirements are met at GCSE level, fieldwork is not used to enrich learning in geography beyond this very basic entitlement.
- At Key Stage 3, students have very limited opportunities to develop fieldwork skills. A minority benefit from the visit to Switzerland but the majority have very limited opportunities to develop or consolidate practical skills.
- Although ICT is used extensively by teachers, there are no opportunities to use GIS identified in the schemes of work.

#### Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- The geography team is a close-knit unit composed mainly of very effective geography specialists. There is very little non-specialist teaching.
- The team has a shared vision and a sense of common purpose. It is well managed and especially good use is made of examination expertise to support learning and outcomes for students, particularly at GCSE.
- There are high expectations and a strong focus on raising attainment, in particular.
- Good use is made of data and monitoring to identify strengths and weaknesses in subject provision.
- Some limited use is made of locally available subject-specific support. The resources and support provided by the subject associations have not been used to further improve aspects of teaching or the Key Stage 3 curriculum.
- Sharing of effective practice occurs mainly on an informal basis. This limits the pace at which improvements filter into everyday classroom practice, especially in those few lessons taught by non-specialists.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- restructuring the curriculum at Key Stage 3 to ensure that it is more relevant to students' needs and expectations
- ensuring that entitlement to fieldwork and the use of GIS is incorporated into the learning programme
- providing more opportunities for students to complete extended work in geography, particularly at Key Stage 3, to ensure that all are stretched, especially the more able
- formalising the sharing of effective practice to further improve the quality of learning and to better support non-specialist teachers.

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 the next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow  
Her Majesty's Inspector