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Dr A Hudson
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Dear Dr Hudson

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 29 and 30 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good and improving.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is good.

- Geography has recovered from a period of staffing instability which had impacted negatively on provision, especially at Key Stage 3. Most students are now making consistently good progress and standards are rising.
- In 2009, standards at GCSE were in line with national averages, although above average numbers of students attained the highest grades. Current monitoring evidence suggests that in 2010 standards will be higher with the greater majority of students surpassing their targets and making at least good progress.
- Historically, only a very small number of students have taken the subject at A level with mixed outcomes. Students are positive about the changes and improvements which have taken place over the last year. An

increasing number are now enjoying the subject and numbers opting for both GCSE and A level are rising.

- Students enjoy the fresh focus on enquiry and the increasing opportunities to work collaboratively. They are able to discuss, with increasing conviction, for example, the impact that the 2012 Olympics will have on their own locality and their lives. They express concerns over a range of issues linked to globalisation, interdependence and sustainability.
- Behaviour in lessons is good. Students are keen to learn. Relationships with both teachers and their peers are positive and allow good learning to take place.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching of geography is good overall.

- Lessons are well planned, frequently in great detail. Increasingly, the focus is on facilitating, rather than directing, learning.
- Although some inconsistencies across classes remain, most teaching is securing improved and often good progress.
- In those lessons where students were observed making less progress, outcomes were poorer because students were unclear about how to access the tasks or the questioning failed to develop depth and discussion.
- Very effective use is made of a range of assessments to monitor students' progress. Students particularly appreciate the extended tasks which enable them to demonstrate their learning in greater depth. Marking is frequent and informative.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used frequently by teachers to disseminate information and support teaching, but is used less frequently by students to support their learning. Currently, students do not have opportunities to use geographical information systems (GIS) to search, select, organise and investigate a range of geographical information and data.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- Insufficient time is available at Key Stage 3. This creates difficulties for the geographers to cover the learning programme in sufficient depth.
- The learning programme meets the aims and basic requirements as identified in the geography National Curriculum. Coverage of place is sound and opportunities for students to explore a range of issues, linked to globalisation, climate change and sustainability, are good.
- However, some gaps in coverage exist in some areas. At Key Stage 3, students have not been able to access their entitlement for fieldwork due to staffing difficulties and logistical problems.

- The current programme does not provide sufficient opportunities for students to study the European Union and understand their role as European Citizens. The choice of the places studied does not take into account students' cultural backgrounds or make the best use of their own experiences.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- The newly appointed head of geography has made a difference in stabilising the department and putting some immediate improvements in place.
- He has a clear vision for the department and knows its strengths and weaknesses well. Capacity for ongoing and sustained improvement is very good.
- Strategic planning is very focused on improving classroom practice and outcomes for students. Staff and students appreciate the changes taking place that are beginning to make a difference.
- Non-specialists are supported well through a detailed and well-planned teaching programme. However, they need further support to enable them to teach geographically to deliver the programme more effectively.
- To date, few opportunities have been provided to share good practice or access subject-specific training. Only very limited use has been made of the resources and support offered by subject associations to improve practice.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- restructuring the curriculum to ensure that:
 - students are enabled to develop fieldwork skills, particularly in Key Stage 3
 - the European dimension is delivered to support students' understanding of their roles as European citizens
 - students' own experiences and backgrounds are used to make learning more relevant to their needs
 - students have more opportunities to use ICT, including GIS, to support their learning
- continuing to develop teachers' expertise by:
 - improving questioning skills to encourage greater depth of geographical learning
 - accessing learning for students through modelling and clarity of instructions
 - sharing good practice and using the resources and support provided by the subject associations to improve provision.

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