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Mr K Dean  
Executive Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Dean

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 20 and 21 September 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 seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is good.

- Students make good progress and attain above average standards in Key Stages 3 and 4. Sixth-form students also make good progress but their overall attainment is average. Achievement is better at A2 level than at AS.
- Students demonstrate increasing complexity of thought and opinion as they move through the school and are confident in using a range of geographical information to make decisions.
- Students' locational knowledge is weak. They understand how physical and human factors combine to influence a region's level of development but too many are unable to set their learning in context.

- Although students have a strong understanding of sustainability and citizenship issues, they are less confident in posing their own questions for investigation and following lines of enquiry independently.
- Students enjoy geography and find it highly relevant. They engage well, show confidence and have positive relationships with each other and with their teachers.

### Quality of teaching in geography

The quality of teaching in geography is good.

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and use it well to produce high-quality, detailed planning with a strong emphasis on what students are intended to learn. All are subject specialists.
- Lessons are effective because learning objectives are shared with students, tasks set are appropriate to students' differing levels of attainment and teachers make effective individual interventions to check, challenge and support students' learning.
- Teachers give strong consideration to the range of students' learning preferences in their lessons but information and communication technology makes only a limited contribution to the quality of teaching and learning. Opportunities are missed to use visual resources and maps and to consider students' own experiences.
- Open geographical questions are used well to probe students' knowledge and understanding. Learning is strongest when teachers focus targeted questions at particular students and check, probe and extend their understanding. All teachers use a range of peer- and self-assessment so that students understand clearly how well they are doing.
- Teachers use a variety of teaching and learning strategies and structure students' learning well through a series of tasks. Changeovers between activities are managed well so that learning time is maximised. Students' written work is well structured.

### Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is good.

- Schemes of work are well written. Topics chosen are matched suitably to students' needs and interests and increase in depth and complexity throughout each key stage.
- Key geographical concepts are included appropriately but some are revisited too much at the expense of others. For example, interdependence and sustainability are covered well but the concepts of space, place and scale are less clear within topics.
- The curriculum is enriched by a range of additional inputs such as cross-curricular days, specific projects, links with a school in Kenya and involvement with subject association initiatives. All of these promote students' achievement and enjoyment.

- Residential fieldwork enhances the curriculum well in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form but too few opportunities exist for the progressive development of fieldwork skills, particularly at Key Stage 3.

#### Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- The subject leader has successfully created a cohesive team across the different school sites that plans collaboratively and shares ideas.
- The uptake of geography at examination level is high and on a rising trend. Good proportions of students continue from AS to A2 level.
- The organisation of resources across the department is highly systematic and helps staff to work effectively.
- Responsibilities are clear and departmental meetings are well focused on how improvements to provision might promote better student outcomes.
- Varied strategies are used to monitor and evaluate the work of the department and have resulted in an accurate view of its main strengths and areas for development.
- Monitoring activities are not consistently well focused on areas identified from previous evaluation. They lead to improvement planning that lacks precision and has limited reference to student attainment and their views.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving students' locational knowledge by setting learning in context
- developing fieldwork opportunities so that students build their skills progressively from Key Stage 3 onwards
- increasing the rigour of monitoring and evaluation so that improvement planning is more precisely matched to need.

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

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Sonya Williamson  
Her Majesty's Inspector