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Mr E Fitzpatrick
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Fitzpatrick

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 14 and 15 October 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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is good.

- Students enter Year 7 having had a diverse range of geographical experiences. Their standards on entry are generally below average.
- At Key Stage 3, most students make good progress although fewer attain the higher levels. No significant difference exists in the attainment of girls and boys.
- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 rose appreciably in 2010 and is now above average. Around 84% of students achieved GCSE grades A* to C and all students achieved A* to G. Improvement results partly from successful targeting and intervention of those students on the C/D grade boundary. However, although the percentage achieving at the higher levels increased significantly compared with the previous year, it remains

below the national average. The subject leader has plans to apply similar strategies for those students on the A/B boundary this year.

- Students' attitudes and behaviour in lessons are good. They are well behaved and keen to learn, especially when they are set challenging tasks. Most take pride in their work. Teachers enjoy extremely positive relationships with students.
- Geography is increasing in popularity with more students opting to study the subject at GCSE.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching in geography is good.

- Most lessons are taught by the subject specialist. Non-specialist teachers are guided and supported well by the subject leader in the few lessons they teach in Key Stage 3. This ensures that they deliver effective lessons and have suitably high expectations of the students they teach.
- Lessons are planned in detail and are well structured. They have a brisk pace and sequentially build on previous learning to extend students' thinking. Resources are selected carefully to make lessons interesting, engaging and demanding. Adequate opportunities are provided for students to use information and communication technology to support their learning.
- Plentiful opportunities are provided for challenging discussions during which students contribute ideas and develop their thinking skills. Questions are widely distributed which increases student participation.
- Students speak highly of the quality of teaching and the variety of work provided for them. They are extremely positive about their teachers' passion for the subject.
- An excellent range of assessment for learning strategies is employed in all lessons. Self- and peer-assessment, plus a wide range of different activities such as 'Steps to Success', routinely ensure that students are actively involved in their learning. Consequently, they have a very clear understanding of how well they are doing.
- Work is marked regularly and most students are aware of how they are doing. Assessment information is used well to support students' learning, particularly in Key Stage 3. Here, outcomes are carefully recorded and steps for improvement clearly identified.
- Although the large majority of GCSE students know their target grades, a small minority are unclear about what they need to do to achieve them.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is good.

- Significant changes have been made to the curriculum over the past year. The implementation of 'Vertical Option Groups' in Year 9 from June 2010 has contracted the Key Stage 3 programme into a two-year programme.

- All schemes of work have been suitably revised to accommodate these changes. All aspects are appropriately covered and sequentially build on students' understanding and geographical thinking. They are very detailed and provide good support and guidance for non-specialist teachers.
- Until the recent review, fieldwork provision was limited. This has been rectified and students now have appropriate opportunities to develop fieldwork skills in both key stages. For example, the recent visit to Hornsea by Year 9 and 10 students was highly valued by the students and is contributing well to their understanding of coastal erosion.
- The school has established links with a school in Tobago. Developments are in place to expand this work further. Work is scheduled with the British Council to implement a global citizenship project with a particular focus on microclimates this academic year.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- The subject leader has a good understanding of the issues facing the subject and is tackling these systematically. There is good capacity for ongoing improvement.
- Departmental self-evaluation is thorough and accurate. A range of formal and informal monitoring and evaluation is undertaken. Outcomes and provision are rigorously monitored and evaluated as part of the whole-school review processes.
- The subject leader plays a key role in the day-to-day monitoring of standards, students' progress and provision. She also plays a leading role in developing aspects of teaching and educational practice as part of the school's wider work.
- Strategies to raise standards have been introduced successfully over the past year, particularly targeting those students on grade boundaries alongside the successful implementation of assessment for learning strategies.
- Productive links with the four main feeder primaries are not yet established to support transition.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the proportion of students attaining at the higher levels at the end of Key Stage 3 and at GCSE level
- ensuring all students in Key Stage 4 are fully aware of what they need to do to improve their work and achieve their target grades
- participating in the global citizenship project on microclimates with the school's link in Tobago feeder and primary schools to further enhance the school's community cohesion work

- establishing links with the feeder primary schools to increase understanding of what geography skills and knowledge students enter the school with.

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

Paul Weston
Her Majesty's Inspector