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16 February 2011

Dr J McAuley  
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Dear Dr McAuley

### **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 2 and 3 February 2011 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.

- In recent years, students' achievement has been satisfactory but it has improved this year and is now good. In Key Stage 3, a large majority continue to make better than the nationally expected rates of progress. At Key Stage 4, students' attainment has rapidly improved. Current data and inspection evidence show that attainment is above average with many students on track to attain the highest grades.
- In the classroom, students use a range of geographical skills very effectively to carry out investigations, despite their limited access to computers. Their collaborative working with other students through a range of strategies is exceptional. The support and challenge they provide for each other increase the progress they make.

- Students express interest in topical issues and the links between human and physical geographical concepts. They become increasingly aware of complexity of opinion throughout their time in school and this supports well their increasing appreciation of how to be responsible citizens.
- Students' attitudes to learning and their relationships with each other and with staff are very positive. Their enjoyment of geography is illustrated by the very high take-up of the subject at Key Stage 4.
- Although students have in-depth knowledge of the places they study, their broader locational knowledge at local, national and global scales is relatively weak.

### **Quality of teaching of geography**

The quality of teaching in geography is good.

- Teachers use a wide range of imaginative teaching strategies effectively to engage students in their learning. They provide good opportunities to develop students' thinking skills and enquiry techniques but make limited use of the outdoor environment.
- Teachers structure learning well. Teaching is purposeful and instructions are clear so that students are confident in what they have to do. Teachers involve students in determining learning outcomes but occasionally the focus is too much on students' tasks rather than on what they will learn.
- Open geographical questions are used appropriately to check students' knowledge and understanding. However, teachers do not consistently focus targeted questions at particular students, drill down to probe and extend their understanding or robustly correct misconceptions.
- Teachers use marking, targets and peer-assessment well to help students to understand how well they are doing and what their next steps in learning should be. They do not, however, use assessment data fully to match activities, resources, support and challenge to the needs of different groups of students.

### **Quality of the curriculum in geography**

The quality of the curriculum in geography is good.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced. Knowledge, understanding and most skills are developed progressively. Case studies develop students' understanding well from local to global scales. Topics which require students to understand interdependence are well planned and gradually introduced to help promote their confidence.
- Fieldwork opportunities are not specifically identified in the schemes of work. Although students are prepared well for examination requirements that are underpinned by the collection of first-hand evidence, students' fieldwork skills are not developed progressively.

- Topics which promote community cohesion, the global dimension and sustainability are emphasised well to support students' personal development.
- Much of the curriculum is aptly matched to students' interests. Ongoing adaptations to the curriculum help to ensure that they remain motivated, enjoy their learning and understand its relevance to topical news items. At Key Stage 3, a small number of topics are overly focused on subject content rather than the development of geographical understanding.
- Students appreciate the individual effective support that staff provide. However, the curriculum is less well adapted to meet the specific learning needs of different groups of students. For example students with weaker literacy skills are not regularly supported with vocabulary and writing and different, more demanding challenges are not routinely planned to accelerate the progress of the most able.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography**

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- The department works well as a cohesive team of staff that shares ideas and responsibilities. It is well informed about current developments in geography.
- The subject leader has brought about improvements to students' attainment and progress and is keen to seek further improvement. Improvements at Key Stage 4 have been rapid and geography remains very popular with students.
- Collaborative working and appropriate professional development opportunities have led to the development of a wide range of accurate assessment strategies and successful curriculum adaptations.
- Action plans have clear priorities that are well focused on improving outcomes for students. They have been informed by small-scale monitoring of provision and outcomes, basic analysis of data and occasional consultation with students. However, systematic monitoring and analysis are not yet leading to incisive evaluation of learning and progress.
- The subject leader ensures access to good-quality geographical resources but has not placed sufficient emphasis on the value of outdoor learning.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- developing a comprehensive and progressive range of fieldwork opportunities at both key stages
- making further adaptations to the curriculum and schemes of work to ensure that they fully meet the needs and interests of students and support the development of their locational knowledge
- increasing rigour in the use of assessment data and strategies for monitoring and evaluation to inform self-evaluation and refine improvement planning.

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**