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Mrs L Fox  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Fox

### **Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: geography**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 31 January and 1 February 2012 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 five 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 in their feeder primary schools. On entry, their standards are broadly average, but cover a wide range.
- Overall, the quality of students' learning is good. Throughout Key Stage 3, most students make good progress. They develop a good understanding of how people interact with their environment and the interconnections between economies and societies.
- Those students who study geography at GCSE level are fully committed and engaged. As a result, they make good progress. Attainment has remained above the national average at all levels over several years. Girls achieve better than boys. Sophisticated data analysis is now enabling

school leaders to precisely identify groups who are making slower progress, such as those eligible for free school meals. Equipped with this information, the department is developing and employing a range of strategies to address this and narrow the gap.

- Topical issues such as 'environment and pollution' and 'energy and sustainability' are studied. These give students a good knowledge and understanding of wider geographical issues, including recent events and global problems. Students have a good grasp of basic skills in geography and their conceptual thinking is well developed.
- Relationships in the classrooms are extremely positive. Students' attitudes and behaviour in lessons are very good. They are well behaved and keen to learn especially when they are set challenging tasks. Most take a pride in their work.

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

The quality of teaching in geography is good.

- All lessons are planned in detail and are well structured. They generally have a brisk pace and sequentially build on previous learning to extend students' thinking. Occasionally, the pace of learning is too rapid which means that insufficient time is provided for students to consolidate their learning.
- Most lessons are stimulating and engaging. Questions are widely distributed which increases students' participation. Resources such as video clips and practical activities are carefully selected to make lessons interesting. These engage, motivate and challenge students. Plentiful opportunities are provided for challenging discussions during which students contribute ideas and develop their thinking skills.
- Students speak highly of the quality of teaching and the variety of work provided for them. They are extremely positive about their experiences. Teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) well to support their teaching. Suitable opportunities are provided for students to use ICT to support their learning.
- A good range of assessment for learning strategies is employed in lessons. Self-assessment, peer-assessment plus a wide range of different activities ensure that students are actively involved in their learning. Consequently, they have an accurate understanding of how well they are doing in lessons.
- Generally, work is marked regularly and most students are aware of how they are doing. Assessment information is used well to support students' learning. Where analysis of assessment data indicates that individual students or particular groups are at risk of underachieving, specific intervention and support are provided. Students are set regular homework tasks to complete.

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

The quality of the curriculum in geography is good.

- The Key Stage 3 schemes of work fully meet national requirements. All aspects are appropriately covered and sequentially build on students' understanding and geographical thinking. The department systematically reviews the curriculum at both Key Stages.
- Topics and themes are carefully selected to provide students with a firm foundation of understanding and skills in Year 7 which is extended in breadth and depth in subsequent years.
- Good opportunities are provided for students to develop their learning in other subjects such as English, mathematics and design and technology. The study of themes such as Fairtrade, HIV and the links with a school in Kenya support students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- Opportunities to use fieldwork and real examples to motivate and inspire students are satisfactory, with limited opportunities in Key Stage 3. GCSE students visit Wigan and this supports their good achievement. However, students say that they would like more opportunities to visit different localities to bring their learning to life.
- A good range of conventional maps of different type and scale is used. Increasing use is made of some geographical information systems (GIS) such as 'Google Earth' and the environmental agency website, but additional resources and training are required to develop GIS further throughout the school.

### **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 addressing these systematically. The capacity for ongoing improvement is good.
- Student data are now routinely collected and robustly analysed to identify trends and seek reasons for differences in the performance of different groups.
- Outcomes and provision are rigorously monitored and evaluated as part of the whole-school review processes. Departmental self-evaluation is thorough and accurate. A range of formal and informal monitoring and evaluation is undertaken.
- The departmental handbook is a thorough document which provides detailed guidance. It includes accurate plans for further improvement and development, although some targets lack precision.
- Effective use is made of national subject associations and good support is provided by the local subject network.

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

- continuing to develop and implement strategies which narrow the gap in attainment between boys and girls, and other identified groups

- developing the use of GIS to enable better analysis and interpretation of map information by students
- increasing fieldwork opportunities, particularly in Key Stage 3, so that students are provided regularly with first-hand opportunities to support the curriculum and increase their geographical skills.

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

As 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Paul Weston**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**