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Dear Dr Metcalfe

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 13 and 14 March 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 10 lessons and one assembly.

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is good.

- A strong focus on enquiry-based learning enables students in all year groups to develop a good knowledge of key geographical concepts and the way in which physical and human environments are inter-related.
- Students acquire a good range of geographical vocabulary which they use confidently during discussion and in pieces of extended writing. For example, following a fieldwork investigation, Year 10 students used geographical terms accurately to produce a well-reasoned account of the factors influencing erosion and alternative management strategies on the Holderness coastline.
- Students develop a good understanding of places on a local, national and global scale through a curriculum that captures their interest. Carefully

selected and relevant topics increase students' understanding about current issues, for example, relating to the environment and sustainability.

- Students use maps regularly and can identify examples of where they have used geographical information systems (GIS) to support their learning. However, variations exist in the extent to which students develop their mapwork skills and use GIS to enhance and deepen their understanding of the characteristics of places at different scales.
- Techniques developed through the Opening Minds and Personal Learning and Thinking Skills initiatives are incorporated well in the Year 7 humanities programme and increase students' independence in undertaking group investigations to solve geographical questions. Students build on these skills through fieldwork opportunities as they progress through the school. For example, groups of Year 8 students conducted a fieldwork investigation to test how infiltration rates vary between different surfaces. They used their results well to inform their understanding of the human and physical factors that might result in flooding.

Quality of teaching in geography

The quality of teaching in geography is good.

- A positive climate for learning, combined with well-established class routines, promotes good opportunities for practical activities and enquiries that develop students' geographical skills and knowledge.
- Where teaching is good, students engage in challenging activities that are tailored well to meet a broad range of needs and are also supported by good-quality resources. Teachers' questioning challenges students to extend their knowledge and understanding and regular opportunities for collaborative work help to develop independent learning skills. For example, Year 9 students worked together effectively, selecting evidence from a good variety of resources to deepen their knowledge about why people choose to live in hazardous regions of the earth.
- Teaching is less effective where too many activities are planned so that students' learning becomes rushed and subsequently lacks depth. Opportunities are sometimes missed to enable students to reflect on the progress they have made towards personal learning goals and their next steps to improve their work further.
- Students enjoy fieldwork activities and recognise its value in bringing what they learn in class to life. Year 9 students spoke enthusiastically about their visit to Malham; a well-planned sequence of activities developed their understanding of the impact of seasonal tourism in the area.
- Maps are used regularly to locate places and identify distributions, particularly at a global scale. However, opportunities are sometimes missed to capitalise on the use of different types of maps, for example, ordnance survey maps, to deepen students' understanding of the inter-relationships between physical features and human activity at a regional and local level.

- Teaching provides regular opportunities for students to use multimedia resources. However, teachers acknowledge that the use of GIS is less well developed and are currently developing their skills in their practice.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is good.

- The geography curriculum has been reviewed and refreshed over the last 18 months to increase its relevance and respond to recent Government policy initiatives such as the proposals for the English Baccalaureate. Additional opportunities to follow the GCSE course at Key Stage 4 have resulted in an increase in numbers of students opting for geography in September 2011.
- Geography topics are clearly identified and integrated effectively within the Year 7 humanities programme. For example, a topic on 'stewardship' makes good links between the importance of sustainability and the views of different religions towards the environment.
- Geography makes a good contribution towards developing students' information and communication technology (ICT) and numeracy skills. An increased focus on developing literacy through geography is particularly evident in the regular opportunities for extended writing using key terminology.
- Students appreciate the links between geography and other subjects and academy events. For example, as part of the academy's business and enterprise specialism an imaginative 'Dragon's Den' project challenged Year 7 students to design and make a product which they could demonstrate would help to save the environment. Students are also currently engaged in researching the countries that a member of staff will be visiting when he embarks on a cycling trip to Australia to raise funds for a chosen charity.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is good.

- Good joint subject leadership is provided by two senior leaders, whose strong ambition to raise the profile of geography across school is reflected in curriculum developments that have injected new energy into a team of specialist and non-specialist teachers.
- Geography makes a good contribution to whole-school priorities, particularly in relation to improving students' literacy skills. Leaders have developed teaching strategies that strengthen students' speaking, listening, reading and writing skills in addition to improving their geographical knowledge and understanding.
- Specialist and non-specialist teachers are enthusiastic about the subject and share a common purpose to improve the quality of their teaching further. They are well informed through membership of professional associations and as part of the local learning community which enables

geography teachers from different schools in the area to share good practice and develop new skills.

- The joint subject leaders use their whole-school experience of monitoring and evaluation well to monitor students' progress and have an accurate view about the quality of teaching and learning. Improvement planning is focused sharply on raising students' attainment in geography further as the time allocated for the subject increases from September 2012.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that students have sufficient opportunities to reflect on their work and identify for themselves the specific next steps required for them to achieve their personal learning goals
- increasing the use of different types of maps and GIS to deepen students' knowledge and understanding of the inter-relationships between physical and human environments.

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.

Yours sincerely

Sara Morrissey
Her Majesty's Inspector