

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr P Beavan
Headteacher
Somervale School Specialist Media Arts College
Redfield Road
Midsomer Norton
Radstock
BA3 2JD

Dear Mr Beavan

Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 25 and 26 June 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 satisfactory.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is satisfactory.

- GCSE results over the last three years have fluctuated considerably but overall have been slightly below average. School data indicate a steady improvement over the next two years.
- The progress of students studying GCSE has generally been satisfactory given their starting points.
- Students enter Year 7 with attainment that is broadly in line with national expectations and by Year 9 have progressed satisfactorily so that the majority attain the standard expected. A significant minority exceed this.
- At the end of Key Stage 3, most students have a sound understanding of how places and people are interconnected and are aware of a range of global issues. They are less strong in their understanding of physical

processes. Students are able to apply accurately a range of geographical skills and can describe patterns and trends. Many are beginning to develop a moral perspective on a range of global issues.

- In lessons the progress the students make is variable but is never less than satisfactory. Where it is good, students ask perceptive questions that help extend their understanding and accurately use geographical vocabulary. They are able to form conclusions based on a range of evidence and varying points of view and confidently justify these.
- The attitude of the vast majority of students is positive and this is reflected in their good behaviour and willingness to engage in their learning.

Quality of teaching in geography

The quality of teaching in geography is satisfactory.

- The quality of teaching over time is satisfactory but remains too inconsistent. There is, however, increasing expectation of students, particularly in Year 9 and at GCSE, which is resulting in work of a higher quality in these year groups.
- Teachers have a good subject knowledge which is kept up to date and is used well in the classroom.
- Teaching is most effective where carefully planned active learning strategies, including role play, research and geographical games, are used. These engage the students well in the learning process and add to their enjoyment. Too much teaching, however, is teacher led and, although effective at times, does not always fully involve the students and meet individual needs. Students have too few opportunities for independent work in Key Stage 3.
- The monitoring of learning in lessons through teacher questioning and intervention is generally effective, although teaching is not always modified sufficiently when issues arise.
- Teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) well in support of whole-class teaching but the opportunities for students to use ICT themselves is limited to a narrow range of activities.
- Students' learning is regularly and formally assessed through end of unit assessments. A range of tasks is used and students are provided with the assessment criteria so that they know what they have to do to attain a high level. Students know their end of year targets, how well they are progressing towards meeting them and what they have to do to achieve them.
- Students' classwork and homework is checked frequently by teachers. Written comments often indicate what students have to do to improve but this is not formalised so that any suggested actions are monitored.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- The GCSE specification was selected to meet the needs and interests of the students and in the main it does this successfully. Staff are still developing their understanding of certain aspects of the assessment process.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is based around yearly themes and has a good balance of physical and human units of work.
- Curriculum plans are in place but these do not demonstrate sufficiently how the students' understanding of the main concepts and application of skills are to be developed across the key stage. It is also not always clear as to what the key learning outcomes are in each unit.
- The fieldwork programme is strongest in the sixth form and at GCSE. In Key Stage 3, fieldwork is limited and does not support the progressive development of this major strand of geography.
- Links with the wider community are limited resulting in a lack of opportunities to enrich the curriculum.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is satisfactory.

- Staffing turbulence has impacted on the quality of leadership. This has recently been resolved.
- The teacher in charge is aware of current thinking and practice in geography and is beginning to incorporate this into teaching and learning. She is committed to provide a good geography education for all students.
- Self-evaluation is informed by examination results and the increasing monitoring, through lesson observations and work scrutiny, of teaching and learning and is generally accurate.
- The department's development plan focuses on improving examination results but is not sharp enough in identifying interim targets and how the improvements are to be achieved.
- Staff have appropriate access to subject-specific professional development through examination board meetings, working with a partner school and access to web-based subject groups.
- Resources are limited but used well to support teaching and learning, with good quality teacher generated materials in use in most lessons.
- The teacher in charge is providing good support for the non-specialist in the department.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving examination results, particularly at GCSE, so that they are consistently above the national average
- ensuring that teaching is consistently good through:
 - the use of well-planned active learning strategies

- provision of opportunities for independent learning
- fully meeting the needs of all students
- monitoring the impact of day-to-day marking on students' learning
- reviewing the Key Stage 3 curriculum so that all the concepts and geographical skills, including fieldwork, are covered in sufficient depth and are developed progressively across the three years.

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

Paul Dowgill
Additional Inspector