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Mr Lambert  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Lambert

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit, accompanied by Liam Tripper HMI on 10 and 11 February 2009 to look at work in geography.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a focus how effectively geography teaching and the curriculum promotes community cohesion.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of data, analysis of pupils' work and observation of six lessons.

Despite the fact that students perform outstandingly well at GCSE, there are many aspects of teaching and learning, curriculum detail and management of the subject which require improvement. As a result, overall effectiveness can only be judged to be satisfactory.

#### Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are outstanding at Key Stage 4 and satisfactory at Key Stage 3.

- Standards attained at GCSE are exceptionally high. This represents outstanding progress.

- By the end of Key Stage 3, the majority of students attain standards which are in line with national expectations. This represents satisfactory progress overall.
- In lessons, students make only satisfactory progress as evidenced through scrutiny of work and lesson observations.
- In GCSE students accumulate much information which enables them to answer specific questions well and meet exam criteria. However they are not always able to step outside the narrow boundaries imposed by exam question technique and make geographical connections. For example, students could describe exfoliation and other types of weathering or erosion. However, they were unable to explain the difference between weathering and erosion. Good learning enables students to understand and explain these differences.
- Accumulation of knowledge suits the middle ability students but does not challenge brighter students intellectually. Students with learning difficulties or English as an additional language may be occupied in lessons but frequently struggle to learn.
- Most students are proud of their achievements and keen to learn. They have good relationships with their teachers and are well behaved and responsive.

### Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. Students are enabled to accumulate geographical knowledge but do not necessarily learn geographically.

- Specialist teachers have good subject knowledge.
- No good or better lessons were observed. Much of the teaching is functional and geared towards providing students with the skills to pass an examination rather than learn geography.
- Students are not familiar with working collaboratively. A limited range of teaching and learning approaches are employed.
- Lessons are heavily dominated by teachers and students are frequently passive learners. There are few opportunities for inquiry or independent learning. The focus is frequently on repetition of information rather than investigation and analysis.
- Questioning often elicits simple recall and fails to develop thinking or deeper learning.
- There is a lack of differentiated approaches especially for the less able and those with English as an additional language.
- The focus of many lessons is on factual recall – although students blossom and respond when set more challenging tasks linked especially to fieldwork. These opportunities are the exception rather than the norm.
- Information and communication technology is used frequently and well by teachers for dissemination of information but it is used less well to interact with students. Students are unfamiliar with the use of new technology as

a tool for geographical learning especially through the use of geographical information systems (GIS).

- Marking is inconsistent and does not always inform students how to improve.
- Assessment at Key Stage 3 is not sufficiently robust to provide an accurate picture to show how individual students are progressing in their learning. In many cases assessment are inappropriate, focussing too much on basic factual recall, which makes it difficult to relate to geographical level descriptors.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory overall.

- The curriculum plan for Key Stage 3 provides for satisfactory coverage and meets current requirements.
- The scheme of work for Key Stage 3 provides a good outline of coverage but lacks sufficient detail to indicate how geographical concepts, skills and values are progressively developed. It does not support non-specialist teachers effectively.
- Preparation for the implementation of the new GCSE specification is under consideration. This leaves little time available for a coherent scheme of work to be ready for September. There is no current detailed scheme of work for GCSE.
- Fieldwork is a strength and is a major reason why so many students opt for geography at GCSE. There is an extensive programme which enables students to experience good out of classroom learning. This is well appreciated by learners.
- In a small minority of lessons, good use is being made of topicality in some lessons to engage the interest of students particularly with issues linked to development and sustainability.

### Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are satisfactory overall.

- There is a committed core team of dedicated geographers, who have a good knowledge of exam processes.
- The department has an unrealistic understanding of strengths and weaknesses.
- There is insufficient focused monitoring of teaching or pupil outcomes to support improvements in classroom practice.
- Resources are adequate. A good range and variety of visual stimuli are used to engage student interest. However, in too many lessons, there is an over-reliance on a limited range of texts.
- Some use has been made of geography specific professional training and development but the department has not made sufficient use of the most

up-to-date training provided by subject associations through the Action Plan for Geography.

### Subject issue

The effectiveness of geography teaching and the curriculum in promoting community cohesion is satisfactory.

- There is good coverage of a wide range of contrasting countries to provide students with a 'window on the world'. This has the potential to support community cohesion well.
- Fieldwork supports community cohesion well. The wide programme of geographical visits exposes students to different places and cultures.
- The preferred style of teaching limits opportunities for students to work collaboratively or to debate real and relevant issues such as global warming, poverty and interdependence or the need to lead sustainable lifestyles.

### Areas for improvement

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include the need to:

- improve the quality of teaching to involve and engage learners better
- ensure assessments are relevant and appropriate and that marking is regular and consistent
- develop appropriate schemes of work in both key stages which identify not only coverage of requirements but also provide an indication of how lessons are to be delivered
- make use of the training provided by subject associations to support recent developments in the subject.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for the next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow  
Her Majesty's Inspector  
Specialist Adviser for Geography