

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



26 April 2010

Ms H Byford
Headteacher
Ryburn Valley High School
St Peter's Avenue
Sowerby
Sowerby Bridge
HX6 1DF

Dear Ms Byford

Ofsted 2010-11 subject survey inspection programme: geography

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 14 and 15 April 2010 to look at work in geography.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit focused on the impact of assessment on students' learning.

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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of data; analysis of students' work; and observation of eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is satisfactory.

Achievement in geography

Achievement in geography is satisfactory.

- Students' geographical knowledge, skills and understanding increase in depth and rigour as they move through the key stages. They have a particularly good awareness of the impact of human actions on the natural world.
- Students' understanding of the global dimension, their conceptual thinking and speaking and listening skills are strong.
- Students have good information and communication technology skills. They have increasing opportunities to use these skills in lessons and to develop them as they research extended projects as part of homework.

- Students attain broadly average standards by the end of each key stage. Learning and progress are satisfactory throughout the school. Students make their best progress in Key Stage 3 where work is well matched to their interests.
- Many students make good progress, however, there are discrepancies between groups. Girls make better progress than boys, and lower attaining students do not progress as well as other groups because the learning activities are not as well matched to their needs.
- Students' personal development is good. They enjoy geography as a result of positive relationships and the opportunities they are given to get actively involved in learning and to express their own views.

Quality of teaching of geography

The quality of teaching of geography is satisfactory with some good features.

- Students benefit from the wide range of teaching styles they experience and the attention teachers give to their preferred learning styles.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge enables them to give clear explanations and effective individual support.
- Teachers' setting of learning objectives and their lesson planning do not take sufficient account of students' different levels of geographical attainment or their literacy skills. As a result, not all students are able to make the progress they could.
- The time given to discuss topical issues and well-chosen resources contribute to students' enjoyment of their lessons. Teachers set learning in meaningful and relevant contexts.
- Marking is too inconsistent across the department in frequency, quality and its effectiveness in helping students to understand the next steps in their learning.
- Students' attainment and progress are regularly monitored and appropriate interventions are made when students are at risk of underachieving. However, data are not used sufficiently well to inform lesson planning.
- Teachers make satisfactory use of targeted and open-ended questions to assess students' understanding during lessons. However, learning checks are not always linked to lesson objectives and questions are not always sufficiently probing to fully challenge the higher attaining students.
- In the sixth form, levels of challenge are not always well matched to students' learning needs.

Quality of the curriculum in geography

The quality of the curriculum in geography is satisfactory.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is broad and balanced. Learning activities are lively and engaging and build progressively from students' experiences at Key Stage 2.
- Schemes of work, at all key stages, are insufficiently detailed. The Key Stage 3 scheme is developing well but contains insufficient reference to learning outcomes, the needs of different groups of students or links to literacy and other aspects of the curriculum. The schemes for students aged 14–19 are in the early stages of development in relation to new examination courses.
- Fieldwork is planned at all key stages. It makes a particularly good contribution to students' learning in Key Stage 3 at local and regional locations and in Year 12 through the residential visit. Opportunities to develop fieldwork and enquiry skills, in the school grounds and the immediate locality, are not fully taken.
- The geography curriculum makes a good contribution to the school's work in promoting community cohesion.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in geography

The effectiveness of leadership and management in geography is satisfactory.

- The monitoring and evaluation of the department lack rigour. Lesson observations are not sufficiently focused on outcomes for students; work scrutiny has had a narrow focus and limited impact; checks on teachers' planning are not made and very few opportunities are available to gather students' views.
- Self-evaluation is too generous since too little emphasis has been placed on analysing patterns and trends from assessment information and evidence collected through monitoring has been limited or informal.
- Departmental discussions are well focused on planning for curriculum change and ensuring fieldwork activities are appropriate and safe.
- The department has identified appropriate areas of focus for the current year, such as promoting creativity and developing the use of the virtual learning environment. However, there is no formal development plan.
- The subject leader promotes positive ethos well and keeps up to date through links with a professional subject association. The leader ensures that the department is well resourced and that the curriculum is appropriate.
- There is good capacity for improvement as a result of the varied strengths within the departmental team.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing the monitoring and evaluation of provision to inform development planning and ensure all groups of students make at least good progress

- using assessment data more effectively to improve teaching and learning and evaluate the effectiveness of the department
- developing schemes of work at all key stages
- improving marking
- strengthening the use of literacy support strategies within the geography curriculum to promote better achievement, particularly for lower attaining students.

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

Yours sincerely

Sonya Williamson
Her Majesty's Inspector