

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Miss Sage
Headteacher
Langley Park School for Girls
Hawksbrook Lane
South Eden Park Road
Beckenham
BR3 3BE

Dear Miss Sage

Ofsted survey inspection programme – geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 01 and 02 October 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 on how literacy is being used to enhance learning 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. 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 seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of geography is outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards and achievement are outstanding.

- By the end of Key Stage 3, students have made very good progress and their standards are well above average. For example Year 9 students make very good comparisons of the earthquakes in San Francisco and Gujarat.
- Students continue to make very good progress during Key Stage 4 and their GCSE results are consistently well above the national average. Students develop high quality fieldwork skills during their Greenwich

coursework. Many clearly identify the advantages and disadvantages of the Three Gorges Project, and higher-attaining students analyse environmental conflicts particularly well.

- In the sixth form, students make good progress and achieve above-average standards at Advanced Level year on year. Students collect a wide range of data during fieldwork in Dorset, and analyse this carefully as they test different hypotheses.
- Students' personal development is outstanding. They are very well behaved and keen to learn even when they are set complex tasks. They take pride in their work although not all respond to teachers' comments in their books. A particular strength is that they evaluate their own work and test results from Year 7 onwards. On occasions, some students do not tackle more independent tasks with confidence.

Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching is outstanding.

- Teachers' subject knowledge is very good. In a Year 13 meteorology lesson, for example, effective questioning and clear explanation helped the students to interpret the Met Office's weather map for that day.
- Two of the three geography rooms are equipped with interactive whiteboards and these are used imaginatively. For example, Montserrat was introduced through a series of images with accompanying text that started with its position on the earth and finished with a three-dimensional image of the Caribbean island.
- Teaching is well structured and clear so that there is a brisk pace of learning.
- A good range of resources are used and teaching activities help secure students' interest. For example, very well chosen images were used to illustrate the advantages and disadvantages of tourism in less economically developed countries, including some moral and ethical issues. Students responded well by discussing a very good range of issues in the concluding part of the lesson.
- Teachers frequently relate the work done in GCSE and Advanced Level lessons to the requirements of the exam, explaining, for example, the sort of work required for a higher grade.
- Students' work is regularly and well marked. For Advanced Level, the marking format also includes a comparison with the student's target grade. Students, at all levels, know how to improve their work in general terms. For example, they know they should provide more detail or that they must concentrate on improving their essay technique. However, few marking comments refer to specific improvements in their geographical knowledge, understanding and skills.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

- The school has a very good scheme of work that is being updated year by year. During 2007, for example, two new topics were added for global carbon footprints and environmental understanding through the school's grounds. Students have some very good opportunities for creativity in the presentation of their work.
- Sustainability is a common element of many aspects of the geography curriculum. In addition, geography is also leading the school's work on sustainability. For example, the department is leading a whole-school initiative, with the support of Global Action Plan, to increase students' awareness of environmental problems and to give them a practical experience of conservation and global citizenship.
- Students have many opportunities to develop their understanding of citizenship and globalisation. For example, through the study of the European Union they appreciate the challenges resulting from the enlargement of the membership, and understand the nature and impact of fair trade.
- The high quality GCSE fieldwork in Greenwich and Advanced Level residential courses in Dorset and Cardiff result in students' very good achievement. Also, the students enjoy this work immensely. In Key Stage 3, Year 7 students have a fieldwork visit to Shoreham village while those in Years 8 and 9 carry out their fieldwork on the school's site.
- Students have very good opportunities for structured enquiry as, for example, they research a wide range of natural hazards. They have some opportunities to devise and answer their own questions, and the department knows that this is an aspect that needs further development.
- The school has the software for geographical information systems but has not yet used it because of difficulties in securing staff training.

Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are outstanding.

- The geography department's self-evaluation is frank, analytical and accurate. The department is clear about the further improvements that it needs to make.
- There is careful monitoring of students' progress on the GCSE and Advanced Level courses. Although the GCSE results are well above average, steps are being taken to secure even higher results. At Advanced Level, the order in which the modules are taught and assessed has been changed and this has resulted in improved results.

- The head of the geography department is up to date with developments in geography education and gives a sustained focus to the continuous improvement of the geography department's work. He is strongly supported by the stable, experienced and committed staff of geography specialists.
- The geography department contributes to whole-school developments; it is leading on the development of sustainability and is the second subject in the school's Sports College status.

Subject issue

The extent to which literacy is being used to enhance learning in geography is good.

- Lessons include a very good range of learning activities and resources which provide varied opportunities for reading, writing, speaking and listening.
- As well as defining and displaying the geographical vocabulary used by each year group, a good range of texts are used and students complete a wide range of types of writing.
- Literary texts are used effectively in Key Stage 3 lessons. For example, Year 7 students use Bill Bryson's 'Notes from a Small Island'. The final part of a Year 9 lesson used an extract from Michael Palin's 'Himalaya'. In a Year 11 lesson, students used a poem by Malaysian poet Cecil Rajendra to identify the impact of tourism on less economically developed countries. A Year 13 meteorology lesson also used an interesting range of resources including personal recollections of the Great Storm of 1987.
- Students' writing tasks are varied. For example, Year 7 students write letters to their friends who are about to visit Britain describing the climate of different regions and giving advice about where to take their holiday. Year 10 students write a visitors' guide to an African national park.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in geography is outstanding overall.

- In all the lessons seen, work was well matched to students' differing learning needs and there was a purposeful, collaborative ethos so that all students were fully involved in learning.
- Vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and disabilities receive very good levels of support from teaching assistants and the teachers. As a consequence, they make at least good progress.
- The progress of all students is carefully tracked so that any underachievement is identified so that action can be taken to address this.

Areas for improvement

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

- implement plans to develop the use of geographical information systems to enable better analysis and interpretation of map information by students
- improve the use of short term challenging targets to impact better on students' learning
- further develop geographical enquiry through giving students more frequent opportunities to hypothesise, collect and analyse data, and come up with their own answers.

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

Mike Milton
Additional Inspector