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Ms R Compton
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Compton

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: science

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 18 January 2011 to look at work in science.

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 pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science is satisfactory.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is satisfactory.

- National tests and teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 2 show an improving trend in attainment in science, but standards remain below the national average.
- In the lessons observed, pupils made at least satisfactory progress, and in some cases good progress.
- The volume of science work in pupils' curriculum folders is limited, although some topic work has some general relevance to science.
- Weak literacy skills hinder the progress of some pupils in science.
- In lessons, pupils behave well and show good attitudes to learning. They are attentive, cooperative and enjoy their work.

- The number of pupils who leave and join the school other than at the usual times is above that typically found in primary schools and this is a factor affecting achievement in science.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in science is satisfactory.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge. They are encouraging and supportive and have good relationships with their pupils.
- Classroom behaviour management strategies are effective.
- Science work is contextualised well and teachers' explanations are clear.
- In the lessons observed pupils' involvement was good and active. For example, some effective use of talk partner activities was observed which gave pupils opportunities to discuss their ideas about science.
- In the lessons observed, pupils had some good opportunities to plan their own investigations. However, teachers' skills in intervening to help pupils' learning move on vary. When pupils struggled to clarify their ideas and plans without enough help, the pace of learning slowed.
- Teaching assistants are generally used well to support lower attaining pupils in lessons.
- Examples of effective adult/child interactions were observed in the Early Years Foundation Stage as adults encouraged children to think about the reasons why some materials sink and others float.
- Assessment in science has focused largely on summative assessment at the end of Year 2 and Year 6.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in science is satisfactory.

- The school's move to a themed curriculum has helped to improve pupils' engagement and readiness to learn, as well as providing opportunities for cross-curricular links.
- Some very good enrichment activities, relevant to science, exist. Partnership links are used well to support visits to places, such as the national museums and local observatory.
- The school delivers the international primary curriculum. Science is a distinct element in some of the themes that are taught. Mapping documents show where National Curriculum science is covered.
- Discussions with pupils indicated that they do relatively few investigations and rarely undertake independent planning. They often struggled to recall examples of science in their integrated topic work.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum includes a suitable range of activities to encourage younger children to explore the world around them.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

Leadership and management in science are satisfactory.

- You have high expectations which are successfully communicated to staff and which are helping to raise aspirations.
- The introduction of the new curriculum was designed to improve motivation and enjoyment of learning, and encouraging signs of its impact, in terms of rising attainment, are evident.
- Senior leaders are aware of the need to develop a clearer focus on the evaluation of science provision, and to ensure that pupils' progress in science is monitored through regular assessments.
- Resources for science teaching are appropriate and are organised well.
- No recent observations of science lessons have taken place. Work scrutiny has identified some weaknesses which the school is planning to resolve, such as opportunities for data analysis and interpretation.
- Little, recent professional development relating specifically to science has been undertaken.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- providing more opportunities for pupils to plan and design their own experiments and develop independent investigative skills
- developing an assessment system for monitoring pupils' progress in science
- further developing leadership and management strategies to monitor and evaluate the school's science provision, including lesson observations and planning and work scrutiny.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop science in the school.

As I 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. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Ruth James
Her Majesty's Inspector