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Dr P Ingram
Headteacher
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Dear Dr Ingram

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: science

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 11 and 12 November 2010 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 students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science is good.

Achievement

Achievement in science is good.

- Students' attainment has seen an outstanding improvement since 2009. The proportion of students achieving two A* to C GCSEs in science has risen from being significantly below average in 2009 to being significantly above in 2010 with 78% of students showing this achievement.
- The school has recognised the differences in performance between boys and girls through the careful analysis of performance data. Otherwise, there is no overall difference in the performance of different groups.
- Students are learning effectively and acquiring knowledge well. They are developing well in their understanding and performance as scientists.

- Students are applying themselves well to the work and, while there is some off-task activity in a few lessons, they are taking full part in lessons.
- Overall students are enthusiastic and enjoy science lessons. In interview, students describe that they are taught very well and experience a good range of activity.
- All students interviewed believe that the care and guidance that they receive are outstanding. They are clearly very grateful to science staff for the help they provide in and outside class.

Quality of teaching of science

The quality of teaching of science is good.

- Teaching is good with a significant proportion of the lessons seen being outstanding.
- There is a shared belief that good science education needs to be engaging, containing a variety of activity and having maximum student involvement through active participation.
- Assessment measures are systematically applied and the outcomes are analysed to monitor and evaluate students' progress.
- Although there is some variation in the quality of marking, it is good overall. Students are positive about the feedback they receive to help them to improve.
- Students' learning is at the heart of what teachers do. Teachers use question and answer techniques very effectively to engage students and check on their progress.
- Relationships between students and teachers are very good with high levels of respect and some constructive humour.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the science curriculum is good.

- Over the past two years, the curriculum has been transformed and is on course for being outstanding.
- There is now a two-year Key Stage 3 followed by three years of Key Stage 4 which provide a range of academic and vocational courses designed to meet the needs of all students.
- The final stage of implementation of the new curriculum is to happen in September 2011. Currently, a small group of students follow courses in three separate sciences that are provided in extra-curricular time.
- The new curriculum provision offers pathways through Key Stage 4 that will provide a suitable basis for students to continue in education, training or employment beyond the age of 16.

- There is a good range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. For example, the use of guest speakers on forensic science in Year 10 is adding positive experiences to those already provided by teachers.

Leadership and management of science

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of science is outstanding.

- You have created a clear vision for success in the school which the science department has embraced. The environment you have built is one in which high expectations and skilled teaching and learning provide a challenge for all students.
- There are clear lines of responsibility and accountability. Effective monitoring and evaluation support and challenge staff in their endeavours.
- The close monitoring and evaluation of students' progress enables staff to make appropriate interventions and provide suitable support.
- The department is led very well and the involvement of the senior leadership team has been of great benefit. Staff feel well supported and enabled to give their best.
- The department presents a clearly coherent team of professionals who collaborate well and share good practice.
- The rapid improvement in outcomes for students has been contributed to by changes in staff, strong strategic leadership and management, a clear focus on improving teaching and learning and significant changes in the curriculum offered in science.
- The outstanding leadership and management indicate good capacity for continuing improvement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising attainment of the more able pupils following vocational courses in science.

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

Ian Richardson
Her Majesty's Inspector