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18 February 2011

Ms K Clifford  
Principal  
Cirencester College  
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Dear Ms Clifford

**Ofsted 2010–11 good practice survey programme; improving science in colleges**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 26 and 27 January 2011 as part of our science survey.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to a national report. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributors or contributing institutions but individuals and institutions will not be identified in the main text without your consent.

The evidence base included: meetings with senior managers, the head of science, course team leaders, teaching staff, tutors and students; observations of six lessons; discussions with students in and outside lessons; review of students' work; analysis of documentation; and a tour of the science department accommodation.

**Features of good practice**

- Students achieve high success rates in most courses, particularly in biology, applied science and also A-level chemistry. The achievement rates of A and B grade passes are also high in the majority of courses, particularly in biology, as well as in A-level physics and AS-level chemistry.
- The teachers show enthusiasm and passion for their subjects and for the promotion of students' learning and understanding. Students spoke particularly highly of the help and support that all their teachers provided within and outside lessons.

- Subject-specific workshops provide effective support for students, particularly in mathematical skills, where extra help is particularly beneficial.
- Lessons generally comprise a variety of activities, and in the best theory lessons students are actively engaged and encouraged to discuss their understanding of scientific concepts.
- The Science Academy and the STEM group provide science students with very good advice, guidance and activities to help them progress to higher education or employment. Many local and regional science and technology organisations are involved with a plethora of activities such as mentoring students, hosting visits, presentations, demonstrations, careers guidance, special events, and the annual 'science week'.
- Students use topic question booklets very effectively for independent extension study and examination revision. Teachers mark these booklets regularly and include helpful comments on how to improve.
- Information and communication technology and the virtual learning environment are used well to provide learning resources and extension activities, which students readily access and use.
- Science technicians are deployed very effectively through the use of an electronic planning tool which is used well by all staff. Technicians' expertise covers all subjects and they assist with demonstrations and supporting practical work when necessary.
- Efficient use is made of good accommodation and appropriate science resources. A variety of accommodation allows flexible use for demonstrations, theory, practical and computer-based activities.
- Very effective leadership and management have enabled the science department to work as a cohesive team who help, support, and learn from each other.
- Teaching and support staff are well qualified in their subjects, have relevant experience and use appropriate networks, outside groups and continual professional development to keep up to date.

**Areas for development, which we discussed, include:**

- making further use of the high-performing subjects to share good practice in teaching and learning within the department and across the college
- further developing students' individual learning plans to include short-term academic targets to ensure that students know what they need to do to improve
- ensuring that the performance of different groups of students, for example by gender and ethnic group, are evaluated in the departmental self-assessment report.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop science provision.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to the relevant funding bodies and will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

**Nigel Fletcher**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**