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Mr P Elliott
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mr Elliott

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: science

Please thank the deputy headteacher, Christine Eccleston, for her hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 9 March 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 the deputy headteacher and staff; 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.

- Pupils' attainment in science is low. At Year 6, it ranges from approximately Level 4 on the P scales to Level 2 in the National Curriculum, well below the expectation for pupils of this age. However, all pupils have significant learning difficulties; most pupils have autism along with additional special educational needs. Overall, pupils make at least satisfactory progress over time, although progress in lessons varies; for example, according to individual pupil's circumstances at the time.
- Generally, pupils enjoy science. They usually like the hands-on nature of investigations. They particularly enjoyed observing newly hatched chicks during the day of the visit, which led to some good quality writing with older pupils.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in science is good.

- Teachers know their pupils very well. They plan their lessons thoroughly. They plan different outcomes for each child, based on their assessments of what pupils know and understand. They are adept in adapting learning to suit the particular needs of the pupils on the day.
- Teachers deploy a wide range of strategies to maintain pupils' concentration. Under the teachers' direction, teaching assistants are fully involved in helping pupils to achieve. Pupils know and understand the systems of rewards and sanctions and clear boundaries are set for behaviour.
- Activities are as practical as possible. However, there is little scope for pupils to explore lines of enquiry they may be interested in or take some ownership of the topics they study, as these are generally prescribed by the school's scheme of work.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in science is satisfactory.

- The science curriculum fulfils the requirements of the National Curriculum.
- The science curriculum is mainly based on the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's schemes of work. It is broad and balanced. However, its content is not as relevant to the pupils' needs and interests as it might be, and it is not sufficiently focused on the skills of science investigation and enquiry.
- Cross-curricular links between science and other subjects are not generally well developed. However, as the writing that followed the hatching of the chicks showed, teachers do take advantage of opportunities to link subjects when they arise.
- The school provides an adapted form of the Early Years Foundation Stage for its youngest pupils. However, the arrangements to provide opportunities for outdoor learning are awkward and fall far short of what is required.
- The school provides a satisfactory range of enrichment activities related to science, such as those connected with growing flowers, fruit and vegetables and recycling.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

Leadership and management in science are satisfactory.

- Policies and guidelines about science for teachers are clear and well organised.
- Arrangements for assessing and monitoring the progress of pupils are good, including the setting of targets. Pupils' work is moderated, so the

coordinator has an accurate view of attainment in science. Monitoring of teaching is undertaken by senior staff, but not by subject coordinators, so the science coordinator has no overall picture of the quality of teaching in science.

- Science is reviewed along with other subjects in a regular cycle. The school is federated with a nearby secondary special school and benefits from access to specialist advice. However, apart from the coordinator, staff have had no specific professional development in science for several years.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the curriculum by:
 - developing work that is more relevant to the needs and interests of pupils with stronger links to other subjects
 - giving more emphasis to the development of pupils' science skills
- developing the opportunities for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage to learn about science through exploration and investigation outdoors.

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

Brian Padgett
Her Majesty's Inspector