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Mr P Pink
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Dear Mr Pink

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: science

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 7 and 8 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 staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science is good.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is good.

- Students' attainment in GCSE science is significantly above the national average and most gain two or more A* to C grades.
- Students make good progress. Their progress is accelerated through the use of early GCSE entry, allowing those who wish to further their science studies to begin AS level in Year 11.
- The large majority of students are highly motivated and this makes a significant contribution to their good progress.
- Students are involved in planning investigations, gathering evidence and drawing conclusions with regular hands-on practical opportunities most frequent in Years 7 and 8. Higher attaining students are able to identify possible sources of error, recognise the limitations of measurements and explain how the reliability of experimental methods could be improved.

- Students reported that opportunities for them to learn collaboratively through discussion with their peers varies between science subjects. This view was reflected in the findings of lessons observed.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in science is good.

- Teachers have very good knowledge of their subject and examination requirements. Consequently, students feel confident and well prepared for examinations and coursework assessments.
- Teaching meets the needs of higher attaining students very well. However, teaching approaches need to be adapted further to ensure that this level of effectiveness is sustained where classes contain students across the full ability range.
- Teachers' planning typically links well to the lesson's learning intention but does not always clearly relate new learning to students' prior knowledge and understanding.
- Teachers use questioning effectively to check students' understanding and promote their progress.
- Examination-style questions are used effectively to highlight gaps in students' knowledge and inform planning for further teaching.
- Students feel they receive effective advice about how to improve through marking and verbal feedback. However, opportunities for students to assess the quality of their own work and identify how they might improve are less well embedded.
- Teachers make effective use of a range of information and communication technology resources including data-logging, simulations and presentational software to support students' learning.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in science is satisfactory.

- Teachers use a published scheme of work in Years 7 and 8 which is based around the yearly teaching objectives. This provides students with a broad and balanced science experience and a good introduction to the skills of scientific enquiry.
- All students begin their GCSE science in Year 9. Higher attaining students cope effectively with this curriculum 'jump' and rise to the challenge of GCSE work. A small proportion of lower attaining students do not manage this transition with as much confidence.
- The school has rightly recognised that the present accelerated route through GCSE with progression to AS level in Year 11 may not be appropriate for all cohorts.

- GCSE science and the separate science subjects are delivered in less time than is typically seen. This limits curriculum enrichment and opportunities for students to explore and investigate scientific questions independently.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

Leadership and management in science are good.

- The science subject leader and his team have high expectations of what students can achieve.
- Regular assessment activities provide valuable data which are used effectively to review the progress of individual students.
- Frequent informal monitoring through team discussions are combined with more formal evaluations of teaching and work scrutiny to provide the subject leader with an accurate picture of departmental strengths and areas for development.
- All staff know students well and a range of intervention strategies are used to ensure that students achieve well.
- The science department is strongly committed to regularly reviewing, sharing and developing classroom practice to promote improvement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- reviewing and developing the curriculum:
  - to improve opportunities for students to explore and investigate scientific ideas
  - to ensure coherence, progression and enrichment for all students
- ensuring that teaching approaches are consistently well matched to students' differing learning needs.

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

Katrina Gueli
Her Majesty's Inspector