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Mr L Poulson
Principal
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Dear Mr Poulson

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 7 and 8 February 2011 as part of our survey in science.

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 their consent.

The evidence base included: five lesson observations; meetings with senior and curriculum managers, science staff and students; a tour of your science facilities; and scrutiny of students' outcomes and other documentation.

Features of good practice

- Science staff have a very inclusive approach, striving to raise the expectations of students and ensuring that they reach their full potential. Teachers and other staff have a good relationship with students and many lessons are conducted in a friendly, humorous way that creates a pleasant atmosphere for learning.
- Students progress well and many achieve better than might be expected based on their previous attainment. Entry criteria for science courses are not set high, enabling many students to enrol for advanced level programmes with relatively low GCSE entry scores. Many of these students achieve well and this good performance is reflected in value-added league tables where the college performs better than most other sixth form colleges.

- Success rates for GCE A-level subjects are generally at or above national figures. They are consistently high for A-level biology, chemistry and electronics courses. A high proportion of students attains high-grade passes in A-level biology and electronics and the value-added scores in these subjects are excellent.
- The GCSE science course has high success rates, with the proportion of students achieving high grades significantly above national figures.
- The college has high expectations that students should attend all lessons and this is reflected in the high attendance rates and very good punctuality.
- Students enjoy their time in college and this is demonstrated by the very high scores recorded by them when completing satisfaction surveys.
- Teaching and learning were good with outstanding features in all of the lessons observed. Lessons are planned comprehensively and brisk starter activities ensure that students settle down and focus on their work promptly. Lessons incorporate a wide range of tasks and activities to keep students interested in the topic. Teachers use directed questioning very well to keep all students focused and monitor their understanding.
- Teachers give good individual support to students in lessons, particularly supporting the less able well by giving them clear explanations, demonstrating practical skills and going through calculations. They have a strong and appropriate focus on ensuring that students are prepared fully for their examinations, giving them tips on how to answer questions to gain the optimum marks.
- The teaching of science is very well supported by the enthusiastic and capable science technicians. Teaching laboratories are stimulating learning environments with interesting posters and students' work that are changed regularly. Practical work is used appropriately to exemplify theory.
- Support for students is outstanding both within and outside lessons. They are given very good support during lessons to help them understand and apply their knowledge. A college-wide framework for providing additional study sessions is well established and enables students to catch-up on topics for which they need more help or to extend their knowledge.
- Students are very appreciative of the support they receive from teachers when applying for higher education and a large number progress to university to study science-related subjects. The proportion of students progressing to university is high, with 87% of applicants in the college being successful in 2009/10 and an increase in the overall number of students gaining a place.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the overall performance for all AS science subjects which is below the national average

- ensuring that the pace of lessons matches the needs of the different ability groups
- increasing the use of interactive whiteboards so that students benefit from their use to further promote learning
- ensuring that targets are specific and students have subject-related guidance on how to improve their standard of work.

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

Tony Noonan
Her Majesty's Inspector