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18 March 2011

Mrs L Brooks  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Brooks

### **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 8 and 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 staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science is satisfactory.

### **Achievement in science**

Achievement in science is satisfactory.

- Students' attainment on entry into Year 7 is similar to the national average. The percentage of students attaining two or more A\* to C GCSE grades in science has been broadly average for the past three years. However, current data indicate that attainment is beginning to rise.
- The percentage of GCSE students attaining the higher A\* and A grades in the separate sciences and in core and additional science was below the national average in 2009 and 2010.
- The progress made by students between Years 7 and 11 is satisfactory and beginning to improve. All groups of students make similar progress.
- The progress made by students following science courses in the sixth form is satisfactory. Progress is better in Year 13 than it is in Year 12.

- Students behave well in lessons and willingly become involved in activities arranged for them by teachers. They work sensibly and safely during practical work, displaying good attitudes to learning. They respond well to the opportunities they are provided with to work independently in lessons.

### **Quality of teaching in science**

The quality of teaching in science is satisfactory.

- All the teaching observed was at least satisfactory and some was good. However, there is not enough good teaching to ensure that all students make good progress over time.
- Lessons are planned around clear learning outcomes, using a common planning format.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and this is used well to provide students with clear, helpful explanations.
- Relationships between staff and students are good. Older students, in particular, appreciate the extra help and support provided to them by teachers.
- In some lessons, teachers are not making effective use of prior attainment data to ensure that tasks provide students with a sufficient level of challenge.
- Some teachers talk for too long or provide too much time for some tasks to be completed and this slows the pace of learning.
- Students are aware of their targets and how well they are doing. Work is marked regularly and most marking provides students with clear and helpful advice about how to improve.

### **Quality of the curriculum in science**

The quality of the curriculum in science is good.

- The school has moved to a two-year Key Stage 3 allowing quicker progression to a wide range of examination courses.
- Schemes of work are based around commercial publications that have been adapted well by the department so that they meet students' needs.
- The range of both academic and vocational examination courses available to students in Years 9 to 11 meets their needs and aspirations well. Progression routes are good for both these academic and vocational courses in sixth form.
- The curriculum has a clear focus on the development of students' skills of scientific enquiry. However, students have too few opportunities to design and carry out whole investigations.
- A science club has recently been established and a range of in-school events, visitors and trips enriches students' experience of science.

## **Effectiveness of leadership and management in science**

Leadership and management in science are satisfactory.

- Senior leaders monitor and evaluate provision and outcomes in science well. A recent, robust review of the department is leading to improvement.
- The new science curriculum leader has led a number of sensible and well-judged actions since being appointed four months ago. These are beginning to lead to improvements in provision. However, the full impact of these actions on students' achievement has yet to be seen.
- The quality of teaching is monitored well by senior leaders and the curriculum leader. The use of in-school training and individualised action plans for all staff are beginning to have a positive impact on teaching.
- Marking has recently been monitored more robustly and this is leading to a greater consistency of good practice across the department. However, the setting of homework is not monitored.
- Students' progress towards challenging targets is monitored well. The data generated by this system are now being used more robustly to identify underachievers and provide them with appropriate support. Good plans are in place to provide mentor support to some students.
- The curriculum leader has a good understanding of the strengths and areas in need of development in science. A good plan has recently been written that addresses identified areas of weaknesses well. However, actions have not been clearly linked to measurable success criteria.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- embedding the recent improvements to the monitoring and evaluation of science provision, so that they lead to sustained improvement in students' outcomes
- ensuring that all teachers make effective use of prior attainment data so that lesson tasks and activities are suitably challenging for all students
- providing more opportunities for students to be actively involved in their learning and develop their independent learning skills.

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

**Peter Sanderson**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**