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Mr P Wood  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Wood

### **Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: science**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 5 and 6 May 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 outstanding.

#### **Achievement in science**

Achievement in science is outstanding.

- The proportion of students gaining two or more GCSE A\* to C grades in science is consistently significantly above the national average and has exceeded 90% for the last two years. Above average proportions of students gain A\* and A grades in GCSE physics, chemistry and biology.
- Students' prior attainment on entry to the school is above average and they make good progress over time reaching high standards by the end of Year 11.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good. A-level pass rates are high; the proportion of students gaining grades A or B is improving and exceeded national averages in 2010. Value-added data show that at A-level students make good progress from their starting points.

- In lessons, students' behaviour is very good and they have very good attitudes to learning.

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

The quality of teaching in science is good.

- Teachers are lively and enthusiastic and have very good subject knowledge. They are encouraging and supportive with high expectations of what students should achieve. Relationships in the classroom are very good.
- Lessons are very well planned and structured with clear learning outcomes linked to levels and grades. Teachers incorporate a good range of activities which successfully motivates and interests students. Explanations are clear and are well supported by presentations including illustrations and video clips. Learning is well contextualised. Students are encouraged to think and work things out for themselves. They have plenty of opportunities for collaborative work when they discuss their ideas with others.
- Minor weaknesses in lessons included missed opportunities to reinforce key points, brief activities that were rather rushed and a lack of clarity in instructions for practical work. Occasional satisfactory teaching included good features.
- Students know their targets and their progress towards these. Teachers' comments on marked work, especially for the vocational course, provide valuable guidance on reaching higher grades.
- Assessment and tracking of students' progress are systematic and very thorough, especially at Key Stage 4. Existing systems are now being extended to the sixth form to enhance progress tracking at AS and A levels.

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

The quality of the curriculum in science is outstanding.

- The school offers a very good range of courses at Key Stage 4. This includes GCSEs in physics, chemistry and biology, and a vocational course. Core and additional science are also available where these are appropriate to students' needs. Students are given clear advice and guidance about course choice to ensure that it fits with their future aspirations.
- The stimulating Key Stage 3 curriculum promotes enjoyment of science and increasing numbers of students are choosing to study three separate sciences at Key Stage 4. In Year 7, the support group provides excellent opportunities for students with specific needs to learn and achieve in a nurturing environment.
- The sixth-form curriculum includes a wide range of AS- and A-level science subjects and a vocational course which provides a valuable progression route for those who have studied a vocational science course at Key Stage 4.

- Enrichment activities such as trips, visits and speakers also benefit students.

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

Leadership and management in science are outstanding.

- The curriculum leader has a clear vision and provides strong leadership. She has successfully focused on raising achievement. Senior leaders have successfully established a culture that enables science to thrive. Teamwork is highly effective.
- Plans to improve the quality of accommodation are very well advanced and new laboratories are scheduled to be completed by September 2011.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and includes very thorough analyses of data which helps to plan improvements. The curriculum is reviewed regularly to ensure that all student needs are met. A rigorous observation schedule that includes sixth-form lessons ensures that the quality of teaching and learning is monitored very effectively. Weaknesses are identified and addressed with follow up at future observations.
- Opportunities for professional development are very good including school strategies to improve teaching and learning along with external leadership development and science-specific opportunities. Very good use is made of the advanced skills teacher to support inexperienced teachers and this helps them to develop into capable practitioners.

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

- further developing the good quality of teaching and learning so that more lessons are outstanding
- continuing to develop and refine strategies to raise achievement in the sixth form.

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

**Ruth James**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**