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Mrs J Copley
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Copley

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: science

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of staff and pupils, during my visit on 15 June 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: discussions with staff; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; informal discussions with pupils; and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science is good.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is good.

- Between 80% and 90% of pupils attain Level 4 in science, each year. The proportion of pupils attaining the higher Level 5 is below the national average but is improving year-on-year. Overall, attainment is average. This represents good progress for pupils who often enter school with levels of skills below or well below those expected of their age.
- Achievement differs between genders. Boys attain more highly than girls. Otherwise, there are no differences in attainment between, for example, pupils from minority ethnic groups and White British pupils, or pupils on free school meals compared to those not on free school meals.
- Pupils generally made good progress in the lessons observed. They showed interest in science and good attitudes to learning. Behaviour was good or better in all lessons seen. The school regularly surveys pupils'

opinions about the work that they do. Returns show that pupils enjoy investigations, particularly those that take place outdoors.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in science is good.

- The majority of teaching observed was good or better with nothing that was inadequate. The best teaching was characterised by first-hand investigations, where pupils set the questions and where the focus was on developing the skills of scientific enquiry. Where teaching was rather less effective, the focus was on second-hand investigations and on the acquisition of science knowledge.
- Promotion of knowledge and understanding of the world in Nursery and Reception was good. This was a remarkable achievement in so much as the Early Years Foundation Stage had only moved into temporary classrooms the day before the visit. The outdoors was used well. Nearly all children were engaged in learning activities outside. The activities to make 'bug hotels' and 'the building site' were of exceptional quality.
- Pupils' work in their workbooks is generally of good quality and demonstrates how the curriculum in science is increasingly taught in themes, linked with other subjects. Teachers' marking of books is not consistent and even the better marking, where teachers' comments are linked to the learning objectives, does not point out next steps or help guide pupils towards challenging targets.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in science is satisfactory.

- The science curriculum is under development. The school is moving away from a reliance on the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority schemes of work in favour of a more creative curriculum, one that is more relevant to pupils and their interests and which is better linked to other subjects. This is work in progress.
- The school has exciting plans to use its extensive grounds to promote science investigations. These are of particular importance because most pupils live in an urban community where easy access to open spaces is limited.
- Pupils' interest and experience of science are significantly enriched by a range of activities outside the normal run of science lessons. Each year, a whole week is devoted to science. Also, outside providers are invited into school to promote science topics, such as the 'science magicians' and, during 'space week', a company that brought a full-size rocket into school.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

The effectiveness of leadership and management in science is good.

- Senior staff provide clear direction and strong leadership to science. They have an accurate knowledge of the school's performance in science and a good understanding of current strengths and weaknesses. They have clear plans to improve standards and quality in science.
- Subject leadership is good. Monitoring, evaluation and tracking are all in place. The assessment of pupils' attainment is secure at a group level. The school has plans at an advanced stage to introduce software that will allow teachers to track the progress of individual pupils in science.
- The science leader has proved effective in tackling the tendency of the older girls to defer to boys during investigations, a factor in their comparatively lower achievement in science. By arranging all-girl groups, the girls necessarily take on leadership roles. This strategy is working well. Girls are performing at the same levels as the boys for the first time.
- The school undertakes professional development in science. It uses consultants but also takes advantage of being part of a close federation with its neighbouring primary school and of its links with a rural school in the south of England.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the focus for learning in science is firmly and consistently on the acquisition of the skills of investigation and enquiry
- improving the marking of pupils' work in science to include what has been achieved in the acquisition of skills and to provide pointers for pupils about the next steps towards their targets.

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