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Mr D Atton
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Atton

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 13 and 14 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: 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 broadly similar to the national average. The percentage of Year 11 students attaining two or more A* to C GCSE grades in science has remained fairly stable over the past few years, while the national average percentage has risen. In 2010, the percentage of Year 11 students attaining this measure was significantly below the national average.
- The department's tracking system and observations made during this inspection indicate that attainment is rising and students are on track to attain results close to the national average in summer 2011.
- High attaining Key Stage 4 students, completing courses in the separate sciences are making good progress. However, the progress of students following the core and additional science course is satisfactory.

- The small percentage of students completing the vocational course in applied science in 2010 made inadequate progress. Tracking data indicate that current students are now making satisfactory progress on this course.
- Students behave well in lessons and they work sensibly and safely when completing practical tasks or group activities.
- Students enjoy science and, as a result, an increasing number are choosing to complete GCSE courses in the three separate sciences and the number following science courses in the sixth form is high.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in science is satisfactory.

- Teachers are enthusiastic and energetic. They have good subject knowledge and provide students with clear explanations that aid their learning.
- Lessons are characterised by positive relationships between staff and students.
- Most lessons contain interesting activities that actively engage students in learning.
- Teachers are not consistently making effective use of information about students' prior attainment and learning needs to plan lessons that provide them with a suitable level of challenge.
- Students are aware of their targets and how well they are doing. However, they are less clear about what they need to do to improve. This is because, although work is marked regularly, it does not always give students clear and helpful advice on improvement.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in science is good.

- Links with feeder primary schools are good. This ensures continuity of learning in science between Years 6 and 7.
- Schemes of work clearly identify opportunities to develop students' skills of scientific enquiry. This ensures continuity in the development of these skills across year groups.
- Key Stage 3 schemes of work provide a clear guide to staff about the intended learning outcomes of a lesson. These schemes are flexible and so can be adapted by teachers to meet the needs of students in their class. However, they do not give clear and helpful advice about how work could be differentiated to meet the needs of all students.
- A broad range of science courses in Years 10 and 11 meets the needs and interests of students well.
- The department makes effective use of the school's virtual learning environment to aid students' learning.

- The department offers a broad range of science clubs, trips and visits that enhances students' enjoyment of the subject.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

The effectiveness of leadership and management in science is satisfactory.

- The subject leader is very well informed about current developments in science education. He has a clear vision for the development of science within the school and this has been shared effectively with staff.
- Teaching programmes and resources are well organised and managed.
- The monitoring of teaching and marking by science leaders is not sufficiently robust to ensure consistency of good practice across the department.
- The department has a good central system for tracking students' progress towards their targets. This system is being used increasingly effectively to identify and provide appropriate support to underachieving students. This is beginning to have a positive impact on raising attainment.
- The departmental development plan identifies the key issues in science that are in need of improvement. Delegation of tasks within this plan is good.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that all teachers make effective use of information about students' prior attainment and learning needs to plan lessons that provide them with a suitable level of challenge
- ensuring that all teachers provide clear and helpful advice to students on how to improve their work.

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