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Mr M Young  
Headteacher  
Birley Spa Community Primary School  
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S12 4QA

Dear Mr Young

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 20 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; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; observation of three lessons; and visits to a further four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science is good.

#### **Achievement in science**

Achievement in science is good.

- Over the last three years, the proportion of Year 6 pupils attaining the expected Level 4 has been above average. However, the proportion gaining the higher Level 5 has fluctuated from significantly below to significantly above average.
- Overall, pupils' progress is good in relation to their starting points.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because teachers plan carefully to meet their needs and support from other adults in lessons is very effective.
- Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with a level of knowledge, skills and understanding that are below that typically expected of their age. They make good progress in developing their knowledge and understanding of the world but progress in communication, language and

literacy is more modest; this remains a barrier to learning in science during subsequent key stages.

- In lessons, pupils are keen to investigate their predictions and explore scientific ideas through discussion. They behave well and cooperate effectively with their peers in group tasks, contributing to their good progress.

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

The quality of teaching in science is good.

- Teachers plan in detail and incorporate a good range of activities that promotes pupils' enjoyment and understanding effectively.
- Lesson observations and lesson visits confirm that there is much good practice in the school including the use of creative approaches to teaching and a clear focus on developing pupils' skills of scientific enquiry.
- Some less effective aspects of teachers' practice include too much teacher talk, resulting in pupils being passive for extended periods of time; missed opportunities to place the learning in a relevant context; and limited freedom for pupils to make choices about how they might investigate a specific science question.
- The balance between the use of assessed tasks and nationally developed criteria to assess pupils' progress is good enabling teachers to monitor pupils' attainment during the year.
- Opportunities for pupils to self-assess their work using success criteria and teachers' use of next steps in marking to inform pupils of what they need to do to improve are not fully developed.
- Teachers are making increasingly good use of new technologies to support learning in the classroom. For example, digital photography is used well to record pupils' predictions and observations.
- Pupils benefit from opportunities to develop their own information and communication technology skills in science through research and the presentation of information.

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

The quality of the curriculum in science is good.

- The school has developed a well-planned thematic approach to the whole-school curriculum with science as an integral part in most topics. This ensures that pupils experience a broad and balanced science curriculum while maximising opportunities for creative cross-curricular links that promote pupils' engagement and enjoyment of science well.
- In some topics however, there is too much emphasis on the development of pupils' scientific knowledge with only limited opportunities for pupils to apply this knowledge in a relevant context to demonstrate their understanding, or for pupils to develop their scientific skills.

- Innovative work with a visiting creative practitioner throughout the year has allowed pupils to explore specific topics, such as 'light and shadow', in an exciting and enriching way.
- Good use is made of educational trips, themed weeks, university links and visitors into school to broaden pupils' understanding of the importance of science in society.
- Activities linked to the school's 'Eco' status help pupils develop a greater awareness of sustainability and their role in this respect.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in science is good.

- There is a clear, shared vision across the school for science to be taught creatively through exploration and investigation.
- The experienced subject leader, working in partnership with a colleague new to the role, has a secure knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses in provision, gained through lesson observations, discussion with pupils and scrutiny of work.
- Developments are introduced in a sustainable way which ensures that staff recognise the benefits of initiatives for pupils and feel confident with new approaches.
- Challenging targets are set but the monitoring of pupils' progress towards them is currently only undertaken on an annual basis. Consequently, pupils making slower progress are not always identified timely.

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

- evaluating provision and outcomes for pupils more incisively and taking timely action to increase the proportion of pupils attaining the higher Level 5 by the end of Key Stage 2
- refining teaching approaches and the thematic curriculum topics to ensure a well-balanced approach to the development of pupils' knowledge, understanding and 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

**Katrina Gueli**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**