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Mr J Bower
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Dear Mr Bower

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 22 and 23 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 good.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is outstanding.

- Students' attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is high because students make good progress relative to their above average starting points.
- During Key Stage 4, students can follow either a single, double or triple award science course. Around 85% of GCSE examination entries result in students gaining an A* to C grade. Over the last three years, the proportion of students gaining the higher A* and A grades has been significantly above the national average for the large majority of GCSE courses.
- Outcomes on science courses in the sixth form have improved in recent years and progress is now good in biology, chemistry and physics.
- Students' willingness to take responsibility for their own learning and their very well-developed independent learning skills make a strong contribution to their outstanding achievement.

- Students' enjoyment of science and their success in the subject is reflected in the increasing popularity of the double-award and three separate science options at GCSE, the improving trend of progression onto post-16 science qualifications and the notable number of Year 13 students who choose science-related university courses.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in science is good.

- The balance of subject expertise is good across the department and teachers have a very good knowledge of examination requirements which is used well to ensure that students are fully prepared in relation to examination content and technique.
- Lesson planning is well structured to support students' learning and is responsive to the findings of assessment. Consequently, teaching meets the needs of learners well and secures their good progress effectively.
- Students in all key stages highlighted a number of strengths including teachers' enthusiasm for their subject and the variety of activities and approaches to learning that they used. Inspection findings confirm that these are key features in promoting students' engagement and enjoyment of science.
- Students highly value the additional support provided by teachers beyond the classroom enabling students to effectively address difficulties in their learning and build greater confidence in the subject.
- The majority of teaching observed was of good quality. However, there were occasional examples where the predominance of teacher talk led to students being passive or where teaching approaches were insufficiently well matched to the needs of learners.
- Students are well informed about their numerical targets and receive frequent verbal feedback about their progress following each formal assessment. The quality of written feedback, particularly the setting of subject-specific targets for improvement, is less well developed.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well to support students' learning and develop their ICT skills.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in science is good.

- Published scheme schemes of work at Key Stage 3 and examination specifications at Key Stages 4 and 5 are thoughtfully adapted and developed by teachers to meet the interests and aptitudes of different students.
- There is a good balance between students' acquisition of knowledge and the development of their scientific enquiry skills.
- Cross-curricular links with other subjects and the teaching of science through relevant contexts support students' learning well. Although, there

is scope to broaden enrichment and extra-curricular provision at Key Stages 3 and 4.

- Progression routes are clear and students are well guided in making decisions about their option choices at Key Stages 4 and 5.
- A small minority of students at Key Stages 4 and 5 noted that limited curriculum time reduced opportunities for consolidation and enrichment within lessons.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

The effectiveness of leadership and management in science is good.

- The subject leader has developed his team well over the last two years; creating a supportive climate featuring high expectations for all students.
- The rigorous monitoring of students' progress towards suitably challenging targets has resulted in a convincing trend of rising attainment and improving progress.
- In contrast, the monitoring and evaluation of teaching quality are much less effective in identifying strengths and areas for development.
- A strong focus on challenging students' thinking in all lessons and the consistent expectation that students will take responsibility for their own learning have underpinned recent improvements to student outcomes.
- Good use has been made of external professional development to increase teachers' expertise beyond their subject specialism, develop approaches to assessment and drive curriculum improvements.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the rigour with which teaching is evaluated to sharply identify priorities for improvement
- extending curriculum enrichment at Key Stages 3 and 4.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop science in the college.

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