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Mr N Appleby
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Appleby

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: science

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 23 and 24 November 2010 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

Achievement in science is satisfactory.

- Students' attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is above the national average but not significantly so. Comparison with other subjects in the school shows science outcomes to be significantly better than the average.
- Students' progress in science has improved since 2007 to be around the average for the local authority and for the nation. For most groups of students there is no difference in the progress made showing that inclusion is effective. The school has identified a differential between the outcomes of girls and boys and is working on eliminating these differences.

- Pupils have a positive attitude to work and apply themselves well overall. Behaviour is good. The quality of work in lessons is good.
- Pupils know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. They are aware of their targets.

Quality of teaching of science

The quality of teaching of science is good.

- Teaching is good and the school has recruited a team of teachers that covers the full range of subjects in science.
- Teachers plan lessons effectively to be engaging and relevant for students. They have good expectations of students and ensure that the work is accessible to the full ability range.
- Lessons contain a range of activities and often include practical work that the students enjoy. The students rate teaching as good and appreciate their teachers' willingness to help them resolve their understanding.
- Assessment is thorough and underpins the confidence that students develop. A group of students in Year 9 rated the quality of the assessment as outstanding; they felt the comments of teachers, both written and spoken, help them to improve.
- Teachers use evaluation criteria frequently with students to identify success and areas for improvement. Students are well used to evaluating their own work and the work of others.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the science curriculum is good.

- Changes in the curriculum are yet to be completed but are well underway aimed at providing suitable courses for students of all abilities and leading to a range of qualifications.
- The new Key Stage 3 scheme of work is based on engaging and relevant science and is produced by the collaboration of members of the department. It covers more than the content of the science National Curriculum and involves, for example, the development of literacy skills.
- The range of courses provided at Key Stage 4 does not yet include a vocational course but the school is evaluating suitable courses to fill this gap in provision.
- The development of the skills and understanding of how science works is a key element in the schemes of work. Students very much enjoy these aspects of science such as practical work.
- There is a good range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities to enhance students' learning.

Leadership and management of science

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of science is outstanding.

- You and other senior leaders have created a positive environment in which science has been developed further. Science has many positive components in its organisation and teaching that could be of benefit to other subjects in the school.
- There is assiduous monitoring and evaluation using assessment and performance data to inform discussion and decisions concerning the development of science.
- Challenging targets are set that raise both teachers' and students' expectations. The monitoring of progress against these targets is a strength of the school.
- The excellent skills of the subject leader have led to a common vision in the department of how science is best taught. The common beliefs arising from this have led to consistently good teaching and learning.
- Inspection revealed no areas of development that the department has not already identified and made plans for improvement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- keeping the Key Stage 3 scheme of work under review to identify further opportunities for improvement in provision
- completing the introduction of relevant courses for students in Key Stage 4
- focusing on ensuring literacy levels are raised and do not hinder students' demonstrating their knowledge and understanding of science.

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

Ian Richardson
Her Majesty's Inspector