

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs T White
Headteacher
Highbury Grove School
8 Highbury Grove
Islington
London
N5 2EQ

Dear Mrs White

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 21 and 22 September 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 12 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science is outstanding.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is outstanding.

- Students' attainment at the end of Year 9 has improved steadily over the past three years and is above average. GCSE attainment in science has also improved and in 2011 70% of Year 11 students obtained two or more GCSE or equivalent science grades at A* to C. Overall progress in Key Stages 3 and 4 is outstanding.
- Science students in the sixth form achieved 100% pass rates in GCE A-level biology, chemistry and physics in 2010/11. However, AS attainments were more modest. Added-value analyses show that science students in the sixth form make outstanding progress at A level.
- Students' progression to higher education in the sciences is also very good. In 2010/11, around 16 students took up places at Russell Group universities to study, for example, medicine, biochemistry and engineering.

- There is a strong emphasis on respect across the school and students' behaviour is excellent. The calm, respectful atmosphere has a very positive affect on learning and progress.
- Lively discussions, along with interesting practical investigations successfully enable the students to develop their understanding of scientific techniques and ideas.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in science is outstanding.

- Teachers are highly skilled in managing the behaviour of their students. They have high expectations and lessons are carried out in a very positive atmosphere in which all students feel they can make good progress.
- Teachers plan their lessons very well and share the objectives with their students. Practical work is safely carried out, well integrated into lessons and the students enjoy their work.
- The teachers are also highly effective in stimulating the students to discuss scientific ideas and concepts. They listen carefully to their students, giving them time to express themselves and then probe appropriately to deepen their understanding.
- Assessment, monitoring and tracking of students' progress are rigorous and allow realistic targets for the students to be negotiated and set.
- Occasionally the pace of learning slowed when the students were engaged in written tasks, especially relating to describing variables, drawing conclusions and evaluating their work. Most students are not confident or fluent writers in English when they arrive at the school

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in science is outstanding.

- In Years 7, 8 and 9 the curriculum is well balanced to meet the needs of the students, many of whom have English as a second language. The schemes of work are well developed and have a good emphasis on 'how science works'.
- The Key Stage 4 curriculum is also well planned. Students can take separate sciences or core and additional at GCSE. In addition, around half the students take BTEC applied science.
- The curriculum in the sixth form offers biology, chemistry and physics. The school is in a sixth form consortium with three other local secondary schools and this ensures that the science subjects are available in all the timetable options.
- Enrichment for science across the school is outstanding. Students can choose science as a specialism while at Highbury Grove. This means one afternoon week throughout the year extra science activities are put on. For example, those in the lower school use the time for British Science

Association CREST awards, Year 9 take BTEC engineering and older students have more practical investigations.

- A very wide range of science-related trips includes visiting speakers and other enrichment activities across the school.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

The effectiveness of leadership and management in science is outstanding.

- The recently appointed head of science shows very strong academic and operational leadership of the team. He has refocused the team on raising standards and working together to improve students' experiences.
- Science in the school has the very strong support of senior managers.
- Teachers are very well qualified and schemes of work are prepared in collaboratively. Morale is high and the staff take considerable pride in their successes.
- Attainment has improved and teaching and learning are consistently focused on helping students achieve to their potential.
- Policies and procedures are up to date and clear and a helpful staff handbook and toolkit have been produced. In addition, reliable tracking and monitoring data help staff to improve students' performance in a timely manner.
- Teachers benefit from relevant and well-organised professional development.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing strategies to help students to become more confident and fluent in their writing.

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

As 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Alex Falconer
Her Majesty's Inspector