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13 October 2011

Mr J Brough
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Dear Mr Brough

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 21 September 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 pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science is good.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is good.

- The proportion of pupils who reach at least the expected Level 4 by the end of Year 6 is above average. Similarly the proportion reaching Level 2 by the end of Key Stage 1 is above average.
- Pupils make good progress in lessons and over time from their broadly average starting points.
- Most pupils behave well in their science lessons, showing interest and responding well to the tasks set. However, occasionally a small minority display low level inattention.
- Pupils' books show that a good range of science activities has been undertaken and work is well presented.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in science is good.

- Teachers are enthusiastic about science. They have good subject knowledge and they are able to explain scientific concepts well, using appropriate concrete examples to aid understanding.
- Teachers take care to make lessons enjoyable and provide a range of learning activities which is well contextualised. Lessons are well planned and there is a clear focus on ensuring that pupils are actively engaged in tasks that will develop their skills, knowledge and understanding.
- Pupils have some good opportunities to discuss their ideas with others, for example in talk partner activities and group activities.
- In lessons, support is generally well targeted, and activities are appropriate to pupils' abilities but teachers' expectations of more able pupils are not always high enough.
- Assessment strategies are beginning to be developed to extend beyond end of key stage assessments. Little use is made of individual targets at present.
- Pupils' books are marked regularly. Teachers make good use of praise and there are some helpful comments designed to enable pupils to improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in science is good.

- Excellent use is made of the school's outdoor resources including a pond, the Eco lab built according to sustainable principles, and an area of woodland where Forest School activities are undertaken. There is very good involvement of pupils in the Eco committee and healthy school committee. Opportunities to grow food plants and hold a Farmers' Market are also valuable.
- The curriculum focuses well on developing practical science skills. In addition to a range of experimental work there are some opportunities for independent investigative work.
- The science curriculum is planned over a two-year cycle to cater for mixed-age classes and the school recognises the need to review this as pupil numbers change, necessitating different combinations of age groups in classes. Curriculum planning ensures that topics are covered more than once during Key Stage 2 to help ensure that knowledge and understanding are developed to an appropriate level.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in science is good.

- Resources for science are good. There is a clear commitment to the principles of sustainability.
- Monitoring and evaluation of science rely to a large extent on informal communication among staff, but discussion with school leaders shows that they are aware of areas for development and are beginning to formulate plans to address these.
- Links with the local secondary school are very effective. Valuable opportunities for science project work have enhanced provision for gifted and talented pupils. In addition, the secondary school has led recent continuing professional development in assessment in science.
- There is no systematic monitoring of progress in science as pupils move through the school. However, the small cohort sizes, small classes and the fact that pupils spend more than one year in each class mean that teachers know their individual pupils very well and are able to adapt their teaching to meet most needs.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing an assessment system that will enable progress in science to be monitored as pupils move through the school
- developing monitoring and evaluation strategies to ensure that science provision is regularly reviewed and adapted to meet changing needs
- increasing the level of challenge for more able pupils in lessons.

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

Yours sincerely

Ruth James
Her Majesty's Inspector