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Mr WA Daron  
Headteacher  
St Paul's Catholic High School  
Firbank Road  
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M23 2YS

Dear Mr Daron

### **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 20 and 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 students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of 11 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science is good.

#### **Achievement in science**

Achievement in science is good.

- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 has risen significantly over the last three years and students make good progress overall during their time in the school.
- The introduction of the GCSE equivalent BTEC course has had a very positive impact on students' motivation and success in science.
- The proportion of triple science students progressing to AS level courses post-16 is well above the national average; reflecting their enjoyment and good achievement.
- The large majority of students show positive attitudes to learning and a strong commitment to producing their best work in lessons.

- Students are able to carry out investigations safely to obtain reliable results and can interpret their findings to draw conclusions.
- Their skills in planning investigations and presenting detailed explanations or arguments, verbally or in writing, are less well developed.

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

The quality of teaching in science is good.

- There is a good balance of subject expertise across the Faculty with teachers carefully deployed to secure the best outcomes for students.
- Teachers know individual students well and students reported that teachers are strongly committed to ensuring that they achieve well.
- Teaching typically features a good range of activities that supports the intended learning well and successfully engages students in their learning.
- Teachers make effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) to prompt students' thinking, model abstract concepts and develop their knowledge and understanding.
- Students know how well they are doing and how to improve because marking and written feedback are helpful and they are regularly involved in peer- and self-assessment.

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

The quality of the curriculum in science is good.

- Curriculum pathways have been developed well to meet students' needs and this has been one of the key drivers in raising attainment in the subject.
- The curriculum provides students with a broad and balanced knowledge and understanding of science which contributes well to their personal development and promotes their academic success.
- The curriculum has been designed to ensure that learning is largely set in contexts that illustrate the application and importance of science. The extent to which the curriculum is delivered in this way varies across the Faculty.
- There is scope for the curriculum to be used more effectively to ensure that students develop competence in the full range of scientific enquiry skills.
- The school's engineering specialism has provided opportunities for students to engage in a range of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) activities that have been thoroughly enjoyed by students.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in science is good.

- The head of Faculty has ensured that all staff have high expectations of what students can achieve and that there is a relentless focus on raising students' aspirations and self-belief. These have been key factors underpinning improvements to students' outcomes and increased progression to both vocational and academic science courses post-16.
- Targets set are challenging and regularly monitored to identify student underperformance. Subsequent intervention is well tailored to meet students' individual needs.
- Faculty leaders have a good knowledge of current strengths and areas for development underpinned by a range of evidence collected through both formal and informal monitoring activities.
- Faculty meetings are used effectively to discuss students' progress, share good practice and identify actions for improvement.

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

- increasing opportunities for students to develop the full range of scientific enquiry skills, particularly their ability to design investigations
- developing students' ability to formulate detailed explanations of their scientific thinking.

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

**Katrina Gueli  
Her Majesty's Inspector**