

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 A Drysdale
Headteacher
Fenstanton and Hilton Primary School
School Lane
Huntingdon
Cambridgeshire
PE28 9JR

Dear Mrs Drysdale

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 18 January 2012 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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science is good.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is good.

- Almost every Year 6 pupil in 2011 made at least two levels of progress in science, almost all reached Level 4, and a substantial minority reached Level 5. This represents good achievement overall, and good learning is evident throughout the age range in school.
- Standards of science work in pupils' books are high, including the reports of investigations that they record in topic 'writing books'. These are well marked, with some examples of pupils responding to the advice from teachers.

- Evidence from the receiving secondary school shows that Fenstanton and Hilton pupils do well in science and many choose to study it beyond the age of 16.
- Pupils enjoy science lessons and look forward to them. They confirm that practical investigations take place in most lessons. They can recall interesting investigations in detail, and enjoy getting to grips with the technical language of science.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in science is good.

- The high standards that pupils attain and the consistently good progress that they make throughout the school are consistent with the quality of teaching over time being good.
- Teachers know their pupils well and carefully monitor their progress over time. This knowledge is deployed informally in lessons, although it is not clear from formal lesson planning exactly what individual pupils ought to be learning in order to catch up to their expected level.
- In all of the lessons observed, very good teacher–pupil relationships allowed learning to progress briskly once the main activities started. Teachers and support assistants continuously observe and intervene to challenge pupils with personalised questions.
- Occasionally, the pace of learning slowed, particularly in overlong whole-class discussion sessions, which did not engage every pupil.
- Consistent good features of lesson planning include differentiated materials and approaches. These are usually deployed at the outset of lessons. Good practical resources are available to teachers.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in science is good.

- The integration of science within a wider programme of subject study is working well, allowing teachers to relate science to a wider context while retaining the essential focus on scientific investigation.
- Communication skills are a strength of the school’s approach overall, with strong and effective emphasis on technical vocabulary in science that results in high-quality reporting by pupils.
- Fenstanton and Hilton school has very good links to the local secondary school, and an extensive programme of visits to local areas of scientific interest; there is an after-school science club. More able pupils are invited by the school to apply for a gifted and talented Discovery Summer School at the local secondary school. Each year several children are successful in gaining a place.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

The effectiveness of leadership and management in science is good.

- The current headteacher formerly coordinated science, and is able to provide very good support for the new coordinator. Their shared vision is successfully developing pupils 'who love science and want to be scientifically minded'.
- The link governor for science is herself a practising secondary science teacher and is able to contribute to school review and evaluation in a specialist context. The good quality of school monitoring and evaluation is maintaining high standards in science.
- Some teaching assistants are also qualified scientists and use their expertise in supervising and demonstrating science, for example a heart dissection. This enthuses pupils (and other staff) and maintains a high-quality profile for science practical work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- planning lesson activities that challenge all pupils' abilities from the outset
- ensuring that the good monitoring of pupil progress in science results in clear actions personalised to the individual pupil, including in lesson plans.

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

Brian Cartwright
Her Majesty's Inspector