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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Mr Kevin Latham
Headteacher
Oak Wood Secondary School
Morris Drive
Nuneaton
Warwickshire
CV11 4HQ

Dear Mr Latham

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: science

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 23 January 2012 to look at work in science.

The visit provided valuable information that 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 and discussions with staff; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; an interview with members of the Student Council; and observation of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science is outstanding.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is outstanding.

- Students of all categories of learning difficulties make good progress in science, with the majority exceeding their targets and making upper-quartile progress when assessed against the national progression materials for students with statements of special educational needs. The range of attainment is exceptionally wide, from the lowest 'P' Levels for students with the most profound and complex learning difficulties to Level 4 of the National Curriculum. In 2011, all students gained science entry-level qualifications at the end of Key Stage 4.
- In the school's sixth form, called the further education department, the aim is to prepare students for their future lives and for further education. The school follows the Foundation Learning Programme. Accreditations are sought in a number of areas, such as land studies and food studies, both

having strong links with science. In 2011, all students achieved at least a pass in both courses and were particularly successful in land studies.

- Students' work in science supports their personal, health and social development. Science plays an outstanding part in promoting students' responsibility, confidence and independence. Students display very good attitudes to science. Their behaviour in lessons was good. They stayed on task and tried hard with their work. Student participation is very well embedded in the life of the school; students play a major role in assessing their progress in science and in the future direction of the school.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in science is outstanding.

- Teachers and support staff know students very well. They enjoy exceptionally positive relationships with the students. Students trust their teachers and teaching assistants. Working from this basis, teachers challenge their students fully, holding the highest expectations of them. For example, in an outstanding lesson illustrating the energy contained within sugar in the laboratory, Year 10 students with moderate learning difficulties, working in pairs, successfully performed their own experiments independent of the teacher, burning the sugar under laboratory conditions and noting the increase in water temperature this caused in a test tube suspended above the burning sugar. In another outstanding lesson with Key Stage 4 students with severe learning difficulties and who were on the autistic spectrum (enhanced), the students had the trust and confidence in their teacher to stay focused when experiencing textures that they found unpleasant, and to describe how the substance felt with precise and accurate vocabulary.
- The challenge provided by teachers is supported by excellent attention to students' health and safety.
- Science is taught in a hands-on way. Sensory experience is critical to the success of nearly all the students' learning. Students find science motivating and teachers and teaching assistants use their enthusiasm for science effectively to promote communication, language development and other core skills.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in science is outstanding.

- The science curriculum is broad, balanced and made highly relevant to students' needs. Although it is conventional, in being based on the National Curriculum with an emphasis on students acquiring entry-level qualifications, the school continues to develop a special strength in promoting environmental awareness and responsible citizenship through science. It also makes a major contribution to the students' understanding of healthy lifestyles.

- Cross-curricular links between science and other subjects are particularly strong. The links contribute to the relevance of science for students. For example, planned links are in place with history, geography, personal, social and health education, and design technology.
- The curriculum benefits from a school that is outstandingly well resourced for science. Although science lessons take place within classrooms, the school has its own science laboratory of high quality and has developed its grounds exceptionally well to support learning in science.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

The effectiveness of leadership and management in science is outstanding.

- Senior leaders and managers provide excellent support for the development of science. They engage in rigorous assessment and the moderation of students' progress in science, and make use of a wide range of assessment tools to assess progress. These include the development of tools to measure the smallest steps in learning for those students whose progress from one level to the next may take a full year or more.
- Along with the subject leader, senior leaders evaluate the success of science provision thoughtfully and systematically to decide further action plans. They take into account all the evidence they hold.
- The subject leadership for science is highly effective. The coordinator leads the subject enthusiastically. He has excellent subject knowledge and a clear vision for the future. He works closely with staff in Oak Wood Primary School to support the development of science for primary-age pupils. There has been good in-house professional development, effective work on improving transition in science with Oak Wood Primary and good development of external links.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- There were no areas for improvement identified in the inspection. However, HMI noted the school's advanced plans for the construction of a sustainable classroom, the 'Eco Pod', among its plans to further develop students' awareness of the environment and climate change.

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 Padgett
Her Majesty's Inspector