

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 E Mullarkey
Headteacher
St Michael and St Martin RC Primary
School
Belgrave Road
Hounslow
TW4 7AG

Dear Mrs Mullarkey

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: science

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit with Trevor Riddiough HMI on 21 February 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 five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science is good.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is good.

- Pupils get off to a strong start in the Early Years Foundation Stage, then make consistently good progress through the rest of the school to attain above average standards in science.
- A particularly good feature of their work is their written reporting of science. This is helped by giving pupils time to speak and write about science from an early age, giving them ample scope to develop their literacy skills in science lessons. They also give extended verbal responses to questions in lessons.
- Pupils enjoy learning science, and could recount interesting practical sessions from the full range of science topics.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in science is good.

- Lessons are consistently well planned to accommodate the very wide range of pupil ability and learning needs, including support for pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- Once the main activities begin, pupils learn at a good pace, and in most cases learn well because the tasks are accurately pitched to challenge them irrespective of their starting points
- Marking and feedback are consistently good, and much appreciated by pupils, who know how well they are learning science, and what more they could do to improve. Pupils sometimes forget to respond to that advice.
- Pupils have some opportunity to assess their own progress and these opportunities could be usefully extended to provide teachers with more detailed information on what pupils already know and can do.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in science is good.

- Science is taught regularly as a separate lesson, rather than as part of a theme, with teachers including a substantial element of literacy into the science programme, from an early age. It results in pupils being able to speak about and record their science work very well.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language are equally well supported, sometimes by teaching assistants fluent in the pupils' mother tongue. Science keywords are translated, as is the occasional worksheet when used.
- Pupils really enjoy numerous trips and visits, including visits to the science museum in London. Two science-related weekly clubs are run: one for the environment and a gardening club.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

The effectiveness of leadership and management in science is good.

- Senior staff systematically monitor and evaluate the quality of science teaching, with the science coordinator monitoring lesson plans to ensure completion of the good science schemes of work. As a result there are no weaknesses in science provision.
- The leadership team have high expectations of their staff, and of what pupils can achieve, and these expectations are shared by staff. Pupil progress in science is tracked carefully, for both the how science works strand, and the other knowledge-based strands. The school has just introduced assessing pupil-progress practices, which have yet to be moderated externally.

- The subject coordinator extended her teacher training to take a masters qualification in subject leadership. Other staff have not received subject-specific professional development.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- completing the moderation of pupil assessment records to ensure consistent levelling of pupil attainment in all the strands of the science national curriculum
- planning lessons that build directly on pupils' actual prior knowledge, rather than an presumption of their level based on externally provided age-related schemes of work
- maximising the time pupils spend doing science activities for themselves in lessons.

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