

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



9 March 2012

Ms J Merriman
Headteacher
Whitburn Village Primary School
Cleadon Lane
Whitburn
Sunderland
SR6 7NS

Dear Ms Merriman

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 on 1 March 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 satisfactory.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is satisfactory.

- School records, work scrutiny and evidence from classroom observations show pupils attain broadly average standards in science, from a broadly average starting point when they enter the school. Written and verbal responses by pupils are sometimes of high scientific quality.
- In the lessons seen, almost every pupil was making good progress, but the school's current priority is to raise standards in mathematics; pupils are not spending quite enough time studying science to ensure that good lesson progress shows in above-average outcomes over time.
- Pupils enjoy science and apply themselves well to investigations. They know how to conduct fair tests, and record their results. They can cope well, particularly in the older year groups, when experiments do not work as planned, and show resilience in dealing with these setbacks.

- In contrast to English and mathematics, pupils do not know how well they are doing in science. They do respond most of the time to written suggestions on how to improve their work.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in science is good.

- Lessons are well planned to challenge pupils of all abilities with good written and practical resources. Teacher subject knowledge is also good, and allows teachers to explore new avenues, respond to pupil questions, and turn to alternative explanations of difficult ideas.
- Skilled intervention by teachers and classroom support staff ensures that each pupil is actively engaged at the limit of their capability. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, who are well supported by a strong leadership culture of championing their needs.
- Staff ensure a good pace in lessons, with little time wasted in long whole-class discussions for most of the lessons seen. Very good-humoured teacher-pupil relationships encourage pupils to try hard and ask questions of their own.
- Marking is consistently good, with clear praise and clear advice on next steps, which most pupils heed.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in science is satisfactory.

- The school sets out to cover the requirements of the national curriculum programmes of study in science, and does so adequately in respect of long term plans. However, some long spells between science lessons, sometimes several months, risk pupils not reinforcing and practising the skills of scientific investigation enough.
- A suitable number of additional trips and visits are linked to the science curriculum, and pupils greatly enjoy these activities. These play an important role in maintaining pupils' interest and motivation to study science.
- Good resources are already available to enhance the practical approach to teaching science that is at the heart of curriculum planning. The school has also earmarked resources to establish a science practical classroom space.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

The effectiveness of leadership and management in science is satisfactory.

- The school has carefully evaluated recent pupil underachievement performance in core subjects, and as a result has prioritised programmes to improve outcomes in mathematics with some success. The detailed

pupil progress tracking in English and mathematics that has helped in raising standards here is now being introduced to science.

- The subject coordinator conducts planning and work scrutiny samples, but is not routinely observing science lessons. Opportunities do exist for some partnership work between teachers in different classes, and these are mutually beneficial.
- The subject coordinator ensures that schemes of work across all years emphasise the importance of teaching science through practical experiences, and also makes sure suitable resources are available.
- Opportunities for including science as part of wider topics set in interesting contexts with other subjects are not always being taken yet.
- The school is not routinely involved in briefings for coordinators, nor have staff or the subject leader received any recent professional development in science, in contrast to other core subjects. As a result, limited opportunities exist to moderate teacher assessments of science standards for pupils.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the planned schemes of work for science are delivered regularly and in sufficient depth to maintain pupils' skills, and build effectively on prior learning
- developing the emerging plans to widen the context in which science is taught to include other subjects
- establishing regular access to training and development related to science, including moderation of teacher assessments in science.

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