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Mr K Hogan  
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Dear Mr Hogan

### **Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: science**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 8 and 9 May 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 students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science is satisfactory.

### **Achievement in science**

Achievement in science is satisfactory.

- In GCSE examinations, students taking physics, chemistry and biology achieve well. The proportions gaining the highest A\* and A grades are above average, and for the last two years 100% have gained A\* to C grades.
- GCSE A\* to C pass rates for core science and additional science were above average in 2011.
- Value-added data for GCSE science for 2011 show that most groups of students did not achieve as well in science as similar students nationally. Current school-assessment data and observations show that students are making satisfactory progress.
- A large majority of those entered for a vocational science qualification in Key Stage 4 in 2011 were successful.

- Teacher assessment data show that by the end of Key Stage 3 the proportion of students gaining the expected Level 5 and above has improved over time and is now close to the national average.
- Attitudes to learning in lessons are very varied. In the majority of lessons, students show good attitudes to learning and engage well with activities, although some students lack independence. In a minority of lessons, many students show limited interest and while very little overt misbehaviour occurs, students take time to settle to their work and talk to each other even when directed to listen to the teacher. In such cases, students take little responsibility for their own learning.

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

The quality of teaching in science is satisfactory.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge. They are enthusiastic and encouraging and they work hard to plan a variety of activities in lessons, including group work, paired activities, and experimental work. However, teachers' skills in using active learning strategies vary, and students' progress is often satisfactory, especially in lessons where students' attitudes to learning are weaker.
- In the better lessons, students were encouraged to think for themselves and there was good reinforcement of key points. However, on occasion a strongly task-focused approach did little to encourage students to think for themselves, so that while tasks were completed, students' knowledge and understanding were not moved on greatly.
- Much whole-class teaching takes place. Setting arrangements mean that planning generally ensures that work is pitched at the right level, but occasionally teaching does not fully meet the needs of students of widely differing abilities.
- Students' work is assessed regularly. Students generally know their targets and how well they are progressing towards these. The routine marking of books lacks consistency. Some is cursory but some does include helpful comments to support improvement.
- Information and communications technology is used well to support learning. Examples include the effective use of electronic whiteboards by teachers and online homework.

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

The quality of the curriculum in science is good.

- The range of courses offered at Key Stage 4 meets the needs of students of different abilities and aptitudes. Appropriate guidance is offered to students.
- At Key Stage 3, science is well contextualised and a range of interesting activities promotes enjoyment of science effectively.

- A good range of enrichment opportunities is offered. For example, a recent Year 9 curriculum day was used to provide information about a range of science careers. The school makes good use of links with local sixth form colleges and universities.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in science is satisfactory.

- Monitoring and evaluation are carried out systematically. The science department is clearly focused on continuous improvement and the curriculum is reviewed regularly.
- The school provides good opportunities for science teachers' continuing professional development, including courses offered by the National Science Learning Centre.
- In self-evaluation, insufficient attention has been paid to comparison of grades achieved and target grades. Nevertheless, the school has identified the underachievement of able girls in 2011 and developed strategies to address this.
- The school has a limited number of laboratories. Careful timetabling ensures that all classes do have lessons in laboratories and suitable opportunities for practical and experimental work.

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

- further improving the quality of teaching by:
  - developing strategies to promote more positive attitudes to learning
  - refining teaching strategies to ensure that the purpose of activities is made explicit, and students are encouraged to become more independent learners and more make rapid progress
- developing assessment strategies further by:
  - ensuring that tracking data are used effectively to identify those at risk of not achieving their targets with appropriate follow up action
  - improving the quality and consistency of routine marking.

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

**Ruth James**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**