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13 June 2012

Mr R Hamlyn
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hamlyn

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 30 and 31 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 12 lessons, including three joint observations with members of the school's leadership team.

The overall effectiveness of science is good.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is good.

- Students enter the school with prior attainment which is significantly below the national average. Attainment in science at the end of Key Stage 4 is in line with the national average. Students make good progress in science, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Students are enthusiastic about learning science and demonstrate a high level of engagement during lessons. They can confidently discuss scientific ideas, including using scientific language with accuracy and precision, and they have secure subject knowledge. Students work well together during practical work and investigations, taking the initiative when planning and solving problems. On some occasions opportunities are missed for students to work independently.
- Ambitious targets are set for students in science and progress is carefully monitored to ensure that they are met. Some targets are not as

challenging as they could be, including for the most able students and students with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in science is good.

- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan activities which engage students' interest. In the best lessons, well-thought-out learning objectives and success criteria lead to clear sequences of learning, supported by activities which are carefully adapted to meet the needs of students. Questioning is used well to challenge students and check their understanding, reshaping tasks when necessary. Teachers try hard to relate science lessons to current events and real-life situations.
- On some occasions, activities are not well matched to the needs of all students. Questioning is not always used as well as it could be to check understanding and to pick up and challenge misconceptions.
- Good arrangements are made for marking and assessment, including those which support students' skills of enquiry and investigation. The development of students' literacy skills through science is a key strength. However, on occasions students are not sufficiently aware of the next steps they need to take to improve their learning in science.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in science is good.

- The broad and balanced curriculum makes a good contribution to students' attainment at the end of Key Stage 4. An appropriate balance of academic and vocational courses is regularly reviewed to ensure that it meets the needs of all students. Progression between key stages is well thought out and supported. All students attend a science and engineering day at a local college in order to promote progression to Key Stage 5 and a substantial proportion of students indicate that they plan to study science beyond Key Stage 4.
- The science department is well resourced, including well-equipped laboratories which provide a high-quality environment for learning.
- Students are encouraged to explore ethical and moral issues through planned activities during science lessons. The school is developing an enrichment programme in science to further promote this.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

The effectiveness of leadership and management in science is good.

- The head of faculty has established a clear vision for science based on the high ambition that all students should achieve a good qualification in science by the end of Key Stage 4. Along with senior leaders, the head of faculty carefully monitors and evaluates provision and outcomes for science.

- Senior leaders and the head of faculty are aware of the strength and areas for development of teaching. Teachers are well supported by in-house and external professional development, including through the local Science Learning Centre. Along with an effective coaching programme, this is resulting in an improving quality of teaching.
- Robust arrangements are in place for tracking students' progress, especially during Key Stage 4. Effective intervention strategies are used to tackle underperformance, which have successfully supported sustained increases in attainment in science.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that challenging targets are set in science for all students, including the most able and disabled students and those with special educational needs, and monitoring progress towards meeting these targets even more carefully
- ensuring that teachers better use assessment information to plan activities that are carefully tailored to meet the needs of students
- planning more opportunities for students to work independently
- improving the quality of marking and feedback so that it explicitly informs students about how to take the next steps in their science learning.

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

John Meinke
Additional Inspector