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Mr H Hayer
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hayer

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 26 and 27 September 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 parts of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science is good.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is good.

- Students enter the school with attainment that is significantly below average. They make good overall progress from their starting points so that by the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is broadly average. The school recognises that there has been slower progress at Key Stage 3. Targeted intervention and effective additional support through the 'Tutoring for Excellence' programme now ensures these students achieve well.
- Students are actively engaged in the majority of lessons. They are keen to contribute to class discussions and often willing to 'have a go' because classrooms provide a positive climate for learning. Some very productive

examples of group work were observed, for example, where students cooperated well to research and then taught that topic to their peers.

- Students are consistently expected to take responsibility for their own learning. For example, they are required to seek peer support before asking the teacher for help, look back in their books to earlier work or refer to text books to clarify their understanding. These approaches effectively develop their independent learning skills.
- Students have regular opportunities to explore scientific ideas and phenomena through 'hands-on' practical activities. However, students have more limited experience of making their own decisions about how they might investigate a particular hypothesis or question.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in subject is good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge, enabling them to explain new ideas and concepts well. Approaches to learning are interesting and engaging, for example, the use of live snakes and their offspring to illustrate inherited characteristics!
- Students, particularly at Key Stage 4, appreciate the additional time and support provided by staff to help them to make good progress.
- Lessons observed usually featured a good degree of challenge and the expectation that students should achieve, or progress beyond, their target level. Planning fully met the needs of students for most classes.
- Assessment is used well to check students' understanding and teaching is adjusted accordingly to address misconceptions or uncertainty. Peer- and self-assessment opportunities occur regularly, enabling students to develop their understanding of how to improve their work.
- Teaching, occasionally, was less effective when students were not well placed to complete independent work or had limited opportunity to use and apply their mathematical skills in a science context. Sometimes teachers tried to move learning on too briskly, thereby missing out key steps needed to ensure students could consolidate their understanding.
- Marking and written feedback make the strongest contribution to learning when students have time to respond; this good practice is not yet consistent.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in subject is good.

- The current Key Stage 4 curriculum matches the differing abilities, interests and aspirations of students well, with increasing numbers following GCSE courses. An early start to Key Stage 4 has improved students' motivation. Key Stage 3 has also been recently reviewed to accelerate students' progress and provide better preparation for their GCSE studies.

- The curriculum contributes well to developing students' literacy and numeracy skills, and the personal qualities needed to be well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training.
- A very broad range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities is on offer. This contributes well to students' understanding, enjoyment and awareness of the wider applications of science.

Effectiveness of leadership in, and management of, science

The effectiveness of leadership in, and management of, science is good.

- The head of faculty has established a clear vision about the value and importance of science across the team. Consequently, there is a shared determination and commitment to ensuring students achieve well.
- Challenging targets, robust tracking of progress and a wide range of effective interventions make a significant contribution to students' good progress.
- The head of faculty is reflective and has a secure awareness of the strengths and weaknesses within the subject, particularly in relation to student outcomes. As a result, successful strategies to raise attainment at Key Stage 4 have been implemented and extended into Key Stage 3.
- The quality of monitoring and sharpness of evaluation as to how teaching in the department could be enhanced further requires improvement.
- In-house professional development, peer support and the use of external training have been effective in improving provision and ensuring the accurate assessment of students' attainment.
- There is good attention to health and safety requirements. Teachers manage and minimise risk while ensuring students can experience interesting and exciting science.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- Looking more closely at the teaching within the department to identify precisely where improvements can be made in order to ensure all teaching is consistently good and more is outstanding.

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

Katrina Gueli
Her Majesty's Inspector