

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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Ms M Austin
Ashcroft High School
Crawley Green Road
Luton
Bedfordshire
LU2 9AG

Dear Ms Austin

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 October 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 good.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is good.

- Students' attainment on entry to the school is well below the national average. The percentage of Year 11 students attaining A* to C grades in GCSE science examinations is broadly similar to the national average. This proportion declined in 2012, but tracking data and inspection evidence indicates this percentage will rise in 2013.
- Given students' starting points their progress over time is good. This is consistent with the good or better progress observed in most of the lessons.
- Key Stage 2 teacher assessment levels in science are not routinely received from feeder primary schools. This causes a delay in teachers being able to accurately pitch work at an appropriate level for all students at the start of Year 7.

- Disabled students or those with special educational needs make good progress because teachers plan carefully to meet their needs and teaching assistants are very effective in supporting learning.
- Students behave well in lessons and show a willingness to engage in group tasks. They collaborate well with each other and are sensitive to each other's needs.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in science is good.

- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to effectively plan lessons in detail using a common planning template. They incorporate a good range of activities that effectively promote students' understanding and enjoyment of science.
- The department has an effective focus on developing students' literacy skills through the use of key scientific words in lessons, opportunities for extended writing and the frequent use of group discussion activities.
- Lessons are characterised by good relationships between staff and students. Older students appreciated the extra support they were given outside of lessons.
- Most teachers plan challenging lesson activities that are well matched to students' ability. However, on a few occasions tasks can be the same for all students, so some are not sufficiently challenged and others not provided with enough support.
- In most lessons, teachers carefully target their questions and ask students to explain their answers in detail, thereby developing student's understanding. However, in some lessons, the questions asked simply check students' knowledge rather than develop their understanding.
- Teachers provide students with effective opportunities to assess their own and others work. Students stated they found this very helpful as it enabled them to see how they were doing and what they needed to do to improve.
- There is some variation in the quality of marking across the department.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in science is good.

- The curriculum is very well organised and planned to ensure that there is good progression in students' learning.
- Scientific ideas and theories are introduced to students through relevant and meaningful contexts that aid their understanding and enjoyment of science.
- The curriculum has a good focus on developing students' skills of scientific enquiry. Opportunities for students to design and carry out whole investigations are well integrated into the curriculum.

- Opportunities for students to use information and communication technology to aid their learning, particularly the use of data loggers are under-developed.
- Good use is made of themed weeks and educational trips and visits to enhance students' enjoyment of science.

Effectiveness of leadership in, and management of, science

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

- The science leadership team has been successful in creating a team of teachers who are supportive of each other and are committed to raising students' achievement.
- The targets set for students are challenging and reflect the high expectations of the department. A good central system for tracking the progress of students towards their targets is in place. Underachievers are identified and effective interventions are in place to promote improvement.
- Opportunities to assess students' progress are well integrated into the curriculum.
- Teaching is monitored well and the accuracy of the school's judgement was confirmed by the four joint observations undertaken with science leaders during this inspection. There are effective opportunities for staff to share good practice through collaborative planning and peer observation.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the overall quality of teaching from good to outstanding in order to further raise students' achievement by ensuring that:
 - all teachers make effective use of data to plan and deliver lessons that are sufficiently challenging for all students
 - all teachers use questioning effectively to check and develop students' understanding
 - all teachers' marking of students' work gives clear advice about how to improve.
- working more closely with feeder primary schools to ensure a more seamless transition in learning between Years 6 and 7.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop subject 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

Peter Sanderson
Her Majesty's Inspector