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Mr P Cunningham
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Dear Mr Cunningham

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 seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science is good.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is good.

- Almost all students take GCSE science and the proportion gaining the highest grades of A* and A was above the national average in 2012. The proportion gaining A* to C was also above national average, an improvement on 2011. Attainment in additional science was above national average. Data which compare students' performance in GCSE science subjects with other subjects show that students do better in science.
- At Key Stage 3, school data showing the proportions of students gaining the expected level 5 and above are below national average but improving.

- Boys do better than girls and students of White British heritage do less well than other students. Students known to be eligible for free school meals also achieve less well than others but the gap reduced in 2012. Overall, students make good progress in lessons and over time. A few show a lack of confidence and are slow to tackle work without individual help. Weak literacy skills hinder the progress of a few students.
- Students are very positive about their science lessons, especially the practical and experimental work. They know their individual targets and progress towards them. Students value the aspirational targets they are set which encourage them to strive to do their very best.
- Behaviour in the lessons observed was outstanding. Students are attentive and cooperative and readily collaborate in group activities.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in science is good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge. They are enthusiastic, committed and caring. Teachers establish good relationships through effective support and encouragement and this promotes good personal development. Teaching assistants provide effective support in lessons.
- Lessons include a good range of learning activities that engage, motivate and interest students, developing their knowledge and understanding. Lessons are well planned and structured with well-presented learning materials. There is some effective use of information and communications technology. Examples include data logging, presentations, a variety of visual aids, animations and revision resources.
- Although teachers typically monitor students' progress in lessons effectively, sometimes they do not adapt the planned work sufficiently to reinforce essential concepts and secure understanding before moving on.
- Teachers carefully emphasise the use of correct scientific terminology. They explain meanings precisely and expect students to use appropriate terminology in their answers. Follow-up questions are asked where students' initial responses do not include scientific terms.
- Students' work is marked regularly. Although there is some variation in quality it typically includes helpful comments suggesting improvements.
- Lessons include some good opportunities for collaborative and group work. Students value the opportunity to discuss concepts and issues with their peers which helps to consolidate learning.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in science is good.

- The Key Stage 4 curriculum meets the needs of most students through GCSE science and additional science and a vocational course, but there is no opportunity for students to study the separate sciences of biology, chemistry and physics.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is broad and balanced and promotes enjoyment of science effectively.
- Some enrichment opportunities are offered including visits to museums. A recent science 'super learning day' focused on forensic science and was particularly enjoyed by the students involved.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

The effectiveness of leadership and management in science is good.

- Monitoring and evaluation and self-evaluation are thorough. Data is analysed rigorously. Target setting and progress tracking are very well planned and managed with interventions planned to address underachievement identified.
- The recent introduction of a vocational course in science at Key Stage 4 has broadened opportunities in science, but the non-statutory government recommendation to offer separate sciences at GCSE to more able students' who might benefit is not being met.
- Senior leaders provide a positive environment and supportive framework for the development of science.
- The science development plan recognises improving the quality of teaching and learning as a priority. It also prioritises raising achievement but it does not identify specific strategies to support specific groups of students who achieve less well than others.
- Some opportunities for science specific professional development are taken. The whole school programme for developing teaching and learning also supports the development of teaching very effectively.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the most able students are offered the opportunity to study the separate sciences of biology, chemistry and physics at Key Stage 4
- further developing the quality of teaching in science so that more lessons are outstanding
- developing strategies to accelerate the progress of groups of students making slower progress in science than those making more rapid progress.

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