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Ms C McCann, Executive Headteacher
and Mr R Rimmer, Acting Headteacher
St Julie's Catholic High School
Speke Road
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Dear Ms McCann and Mr Rimmer

Ofsted 2010-11 subject survey inspection programme: science

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 26 and 27 May 2010 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.

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.

- Pass rates for most GCSE science courses are high. In 2009, the pass rate for the OCR level 2 national award in science was also high.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 3, measured by national test results and more recently by teacher assessment, are slightly above average.
- Standards in the sixth form are broadly average. GCE A-level pass rates are high. Value-added data show that sixth-form students make progress in line with expectations based on their prior attainment.
- Students made good progress in most of the lessons observed.
- Work in students' books is well presented across the ability range.
- Students know their targets and their progress towards these.

- Students' behaviour is excellent and they display very good attitudes to learning. Science lessons provide some good opportunities for personal development, through activities such as role-play and groupwork.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in science is good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and their explanations are clear.
- Good relationships exist between students and their teachers.
- In the lessons observed, a good variety of activities was seen. Examples included a role-play activity, experimental work, and group exercises as well as individual work.
- Lessons are well planned and structured to build learning in appropriate steps. Teachers are usually careful to reinforce key points effectively.
- In Key Stage 3 lessons, there was good contextualisation of work which helped to make the lessons interesting and enjoyable.
- Teachers made effective use of question and answer to establish prior learning and check understanding.
- Some good collaborative group activities were seen which gave students opportunities to discuss their ideas about science.
- In most of the lessons observed, a whole-class approach was adopted, which generally worked well. A few examples of activity differentiated by ability were seen. Less able students generally received appropriate support from teachers and teaching assistants.
- Worksheets and other learning materials are well presented and include a range of suitable tasks and activities.
- The marking of students' books is inconsistent in terms of frequency and the nature of marks and comments. There is little specific guidance on how students could improve their work to reach a higher level or grade.
- Students are assessed regularly and progress is monitored effectively.
- Students spoken to were generally very positive about science.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in science is good.

- The range of courses at Key Stage 4 is very good. This includes science, additional science, physics, chemistry, biology and national certificate. In addition, Entry level is offered when appropriate to meet individual needs.
- In the sixth-form, AS and A levels are offered in physics, chemistry and biology. There is no vocational course to provide progression from the national certificate at Key Stage 4.
- The new scheme of work at Key Stage 3 presents science in a contextualised manner which is improving engagement and enjoyment of

science. There is an emphasis on 'How science works' and developing skills.

- Information and communication technology is used effectively to enhance learning in science.
- There are some appropriate opportunities for independent investigative work.
- There are some excellent enrichment opportunities. The recent trip to Honduras involved collaboration between the science, languages and geography department.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

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

- School leaders have acknowledged that there was a failure to certificate one group of students at the appropriate time for one GCSE in science in 2009 which led to an anomaly in published data. Systems have since been improved and additional checks built in to ensure that this does not happen in future.
- Day-to-day operational management is effective.
- The science self-evaluation is a thorough and comprehensive document which is largely accurate. It includes a detailed analysis of performance and progress data.
- Within the science department, curriculum development work has focused on selecting schemes of work and courses which will improve students' engagement and enjoyment of science.
- A range of strategies is in place to improve teaching and learning and these are having an impact.
- The science action plan includes several relevant priorities, but it does not specifically include strategies to improve the numbers of students taking science courses equivalent to two or more GCSEs at Key Stage 4.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- further developing strategies to improve the uptake of science courses at Key Stage 4
- considering the introduction of an appropriate sixth-form science course that would enable students to progress from the vocational course at Key Stage 4
- developing a clear marking policy so that there is consistency in the frequency with which books are marked, and students receive appropriate feedback about improving their work and raising their levels and grades.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop science in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website under the URN for your school. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Ruth James
Her Majesty's Inspector