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Mrs Woolley
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Woolley

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 27-28 September 2006 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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in science are satisfactory.

- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is improving, although more able students do not achieve as well as they should.
- Attainment in Key Stage 4 has improved and the underachievement of girls has been resolved.
- The progress made by most students in lessons is satisfactory.
- The standards of work in lessons are too variable, partly as a result of lack of clarity in planned outcomes to recognise the range of ability in classes.
- Most students in Key Stage 3 are positive about science, but many in Key Stage 4 show little enthusiasm for the subject.

Quality of teaching and learning in science

The overall quality of teaching and learning in science is satisfactory.

- All teachers are committed to raising achievement.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and use this well in planning lessons and producing teaching resources, and to provide clear, accurate explanations for students.
- Much teaching is not matched well to the needs of all students.
- Marking of students' work does not provide them with feedback on their progress.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is matched well to the needs of students and meets all requirements.
- The new scheme of work for Key Stage 3 provides a secure framework for progression.
- A useful set of assessment tasks is being developed to support target setting and students' progress.
- The recently introduced scheme for Key Stage 4 makes science accessible and more interesting to a wider range of students and enables the school to raise students' expectations and motivate them more about science.

Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management of science are good.

- The science faculty has suffered from considerable instability in the last few years and the school has put in place a good recovery plan to ensure the improvements in science are secured and sustained.
- The new head of science, who took up post in September this year, is already clear about the main areas requiring improvement and a good action plan has been produced.
- There is a good balance of experience and 'youthful enthusiasm' in the faculty with the willingness to embrace change.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is satisfactory, but with significant aspects requiring improvement.

- Little specific attention is given to students with learning difficulties and disabilities in science, although a small number has support from teaching assistants. However, there are good plans to remedy this situation.
- The levels of challenge for, and expectations of, many pupils across the full ability range are too low.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- the priorities for the school to raise standards in science, which are:
 - raising students' expectations in science and setting them more challenging targets
 - developing students' skills in scientific reasoning and developing their independence
 - matching teaching better to the needs of the students
 - improving the feedback to students to support their progress;
- the professional development required to achieve this, focusing on:
 - setting more clearly defined and differentiated learning objectives matched to assessment strategies
 - how to structure science lessons to support students' learning
 - developing a broader range of approaches to teaching to engage students more.

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

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Jim Sage
Her Majesty's Inspector