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26 September 2006

Miss Janet Burns
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Dear Miss Burns

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 20-21 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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' 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 both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 were unsatisfactory in 2005.
- In 2006 pupils Key Stage 3 test results in science improved significantly. The proportion of pupils achieving level 5 and above was higher than that found nationally. The proportion achieving level 6 and above was similar to the national figure.
- GCSE results also improved in 2006. The overall percentage of pupils who gained grades A*-C for GCSE science courses rose to above the national average.
- Attendance is good.

- Behaviour is very good.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning in science are good.

- Lessons are planned to include a wide range of teaching and learning strategies and practical work.
- Very good use is made of a variety of different and imaginative activities in science lessons which motivate and interest pupils. These include video clips, demonstrations, annotation of colour photographs, card matching exercises, and experiments.
- Learning materials are good. They are well designed and presented, and help pupils to focus on key learning points.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge.
- In some lessons insufficient attention is given to differentiation to ensure that lessons meet the needs of all pupils across the ability range.
- In a minority of lessons the learning of a few pupils is hindered because they do not participate effectively in all parts of the lesson. These pupils rely too heavily on others' work in group activities, or they are very slow to get started on set tasks and fail to complete them.
- In some lessons there are few opportunities for pupils to think enough for themselves. Teachers provide appropriate activities and direction but do not do enough to encourage pupils to develop their own thinking skills.
- Some effective use is made of individual targets. Pupils know the levels or grades they are aiming for and what they need to do to achieve these.
- No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Little outstanding teaching and learning were observed.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum in science is satisfactory.

- There is an appropriate choice of GCSE courses at Key Stage 4.
- Appropriate cross curricular links are made, for example between science and health.
- There are few trips and visits to enhance learning in science.

Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management of science are satisfactory.

- Leadership and management failed to identify pupil underachievement at an early enough stage during 2004-05.

- Actions taken since 2005 have led to significant improvements in pupils' achievements.
- An internal subject review in December 2005 identified several areas for development, and action has been taken in response to these.
- The science self evaluation includes a thorough analysis of data, but relatively little evaluation of teaching and learning.

Inclusion

Inclusion in science is satisfactory.

- Pupils with additional needs receive appropriate support from teaching assistants in lessons.
- Some lessons do not meet the needs of all the less able pupils.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to ensure that practices throughout the science department are consistent through regular and thorough monitoring with intervention when necessary
- to continue to develop opportunities for pupils to become more independent learners by including in lessons more opportunities for them to apply their knowledge and understanding and develop their thinking skills
- to ensure that all lessons are planned to meet the needs of pupils of all abilities.

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

Ruth James
Her Majesty's Inspector