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Mr David Watson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Watson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 14 September 2006 to look at work in science.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit also explored the management of attendance.

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: discussions with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in science are good

- Lessons were seen with mixed ability groups in Years 5 to 8. In general, standards in science are above average for each age group. This confirms the impression from national tests in Year 6, where attainment was above average in 2005 and 2006.
- Lessons, discussion with pupils and scrutiny of their work showed that achievement in science is generally good. However, less able pupils have sometimes not understood or have forgotten basic facts due to

lack of consolidation or reinforcement of learning. Some more able pupils do not have a complete grasp of the finer points of topics they have covered and in lessons opportunities to stretch the more able are not always exploited.

## Pupils' personal development

Personal development is good

- Pupils conduct themselves well in lessons and about the school. Pupils of all ages and abilities show good attention in lessons and cooperate well with their teachers and one another.
- The presentation of pupils' work in books is of average quality. As pupils' attainment is above average, there is scope for improving presentation.
- The management of attendance was a minor focus for this inspection visit. Attendance is high and at least as good as might be expected for the context of the school. In line with local authority initiatives, the school has recently carried out an audit of its procedures for managing attendance. Many procedures for managing attendance are in place; others are developing. The attention that the school gives to this matter is appropriately modest in view of pupils' generally strong attendance.

## Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning in science are good

- Five lessons were seen, four were good and one outstanding. The best work engaged pupils in expansive discussion which stretched the more able, and ensured simple consolidation for the less able. On occasion, ICT was used effectively.
- All classes for science contain a wide range of ability. Sometimes work planned occupies all pupils in a reasonably productive way, but does not establish simple basic knowledge for the least able, nor does it take the more able as far as they might go in exploring the further implications of what they are learning.
- Before work on a new topic starts, pupils are asked to check points they are already secure with and those they know little about. In principle, this is good practice. Pupils say that they wish more specific attention was then given to the two or three points they have said they needed to learn.
- There are tests at the end of topics. However, over a longer period (a year) some pupils have forgotten key facts. Moreover, some more able pupils have gaps in their knowledge suggesting that snippets of topics were not covered in the first place. The school needs to draw conclusions from such assessment information with regard to re-visiting and reinforcing topics and plugging gaps that become apparent

in pupils' knowledge. Assessment should inform ongoing teaching to a greater extent.

- Marking is of a reasonable standard. Pupils understand the grades or scores given to summarise their attainment. There are instances of helpful advice for improvement or to increase understanding.

## Quality of the curriculum

The science curriculum is generally good

- In all years, the school loosely follows published schemes with some amplification to make best use of available resources and to tie in work with First Schools and the Upper School. This generally gives good continuity and progression. The school might make more use of assessment information to fine-tune the planning of what is taught, ensuring that planned activities meet the needs of pupils of all abilities.

## Leadership and management

Leadership and management are generally good

- The curriculum, assessment and the range of functions of a subject department are generally managed effectively. Many teachers participate in the teaching of the subject and the staff involved in teaching younger pupils change from year to year. The team is well led and managed. The school is aware of the strengths and areas for development in science.
- Professional development is restricted by limited funding and the distance to venues for INSET provision.
- There have been no major expenses for the science department in the current year (no new books or capital items). However, the budget is generally low for schools of this kind.
- The two laboratories are adequate but very shabby; they present an uninviting learning environment. Modest improvement could be achieved by attention to paintwork and the cleaning of bench surfaces.
- The school has a substantial and longstanding budget deficit. Though the deficit is generally managed well, the position inhibits some necessary improvement in provision in science. The school should work together with the local authority to find ways of improving this state of affairs.

## Inclusion

Inclusion is good

- The school provides a secure ethos in which all pupils, including those who find it hard to concentrate, and those who are not well coordinated, enjoy learning. The school might reflect on the challenge

of meeting all needs as well as possible in classes with a wide ability range.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to do more to provide for the most able and the least able
- to make fuller use of assessment information
- to improve pupils' presentation of work.

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 Bennetts  
Her Majesty's Inspector