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Mr Abbott
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Dear Mr Abbott

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 27 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.

- Standards in science are below the national average, and pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall, taking into account their prior attainment. Pupils in Year 6 show the greatest achievement.
- In the end of Key Stage 2 national tests in 2006, science results were below the national average but close to what was expected, and better than in English and mathematics. Science results were similar to those in 2005.
- Poor literacy skills limit pupils' progress, but where teachers stress the importance of careful explanation and insist on pupils using correct science terms, pupils' progress is evident.

- Investigative skills are variable. Some pupils are not familiar with the ideas of fair testing and pupils do not take enough responsibility for planning investigations themselves.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory overall, and often good. They enjoy science. However, in some lessons pupils are noisy and this impedes progress and slows learning.

Quality of teaching and learning of Science

The quality of teaching and learning in science is satisfactory.

- Teachers prepare lessons to include a good range of activities that interest pupils.
- The planning of work to match pupils' needs is inconsistent. It is not always explicit in planning although some teachers work hard to ensure that all pupils are suitably challenged.
- In the best lessons teachers expect pupils to explain their understanding both orally and in writing, using scientific language accurately; pupils' learning benefits as a result.
- Teachers do not consistently manage pupils' behaviour effectively, often allowing more noise than is necessary which disrupts other pupils' learning.
- Teachers frequently include practical work in lessons, but have not established teaching investigations so that pupils consistently have opportunities to plan and design their own investigations and to apply the principles of 'fair testing'.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- National Curriculum requirements are met.
- Schemes of work include planned opportunities for assessment, differentiated tasks and investigations. However, consistent implementation of these is not evident in all classrooms.
- The use of ICT is improving, but is a little inconsistent too.
- Extracurricular provision is limited.

Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management of science are satisfactory.

- There is a subject leadership team of five staff, and they work together satisfactorily.
- Overall, there are clear general views about the need to raise standards, improve assessment, and to improve investigation based on a whole school investigation planning framework.

- Monitoring and evaluation of science lessons is not specific enough, and lesson observation reports give no clear judgments about the quality of teaching and learning. Only general points for improvement are provided.
- There is no reported progress on the science action plan since April 2004 – the priorities remain same since that time.
- Assessment is satisfactory and improving. The process of tracking pupils' performance is secure, but the consistent use of this data to indicate what pupils do well, what levels they have reached, and what they need to do to improve is underdeveloped.
- Involvement in training initiatives is satisfactory overall.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is satisfactory.

- Differentiation is built into schemes of work and seen in the planning process. Implementation is satisfactory and improving.
- The school has recognised underachievement, due to improving assessment procedures, and is dealing with it. The rate of change is slow, partially due to staff changes.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the management of pupils' behaviour, to ensure that the school's behaviour management strategies are fully implemented so that noise levels are reduced and do not interfere with other pupils' learning
- improving the quality of science investigations so that pupils grasp the principles of 'fair testing' and have opportunities to take control of investigations themselves
- ensuring assessment information is used thoroughly so that pupils and teachers have a secure view of what pupils do well, what levels they have reached and what they need to do to improve further
- improving monitoring and evaluation of teaching to provide clear judgments on the quality of teaching and learning, so that development planning can be sharply focused on raising standards.

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

Ted Wheatley
Additional Inspector