

16 October 2006

Mr Martin Rostron
Principal
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Dear Mr Rostron

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme 2006/07

Sector Skills Area: 2 – Science post-16

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 9 and 10 October 2006. I am very grateful to the science teaching staff for all their hard work in preparing the programme and background documentation and giving up a great deal of their time during the visit. Please pass on my thanks to all staff and learners who gave up their time to talk to me.

The visit provided much useful evidence for the good practice survey in science. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but should we wish to cite specific aspects of practice we will contact the college first. All college letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

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

I agreed to provide a summary of my observations of good practice seen in the sciences and to suggest some areas for development.

Achievement and standards

- Overall achievement and standards in science are outstanding.
- For the vast majority of science courses success, retention and pass rates are very high. In 2006 all science GCE AS level courses except one had success rates of over 90%. At GCE A level all subjects except one had success rates of at least 95%.

- In most subjects the proportion of students attaining the highest grades is consistently well above that found nationally in sixth form colleges. In most science subjects at GCE AS and A level over 20% more students attain A and B grades than national figures.
- Value added data show that in all science subjects students consistently achieve higher grades than would be expected given their prior attainment at GCSE.

Quality of provision

- Science teachers are very well qualified. They successfully convey their enthusiasm for their subjects to students and have high expectations. They are dedicated to achieving the very best results for their students.
- In lessons there is a very good range of interesting activities including practical and experimental work, presentations, discussions, groupwork and worksheet completion.
- Students are provided with very good learning materials including subject handbooks and study packs. These are very well designed and structured and help to promote learning.
- Good use is made of information and communications technology in teaching and learning in science. The college has invested in this area since the last inspection and electronic whiteboards and laptops are now effectively used in science to support learning. The college intranet includes a good range of science materials and links to relevant websites.
- Teachers make some particularly effective use of directed questions in lessons.
- In lessons there are some good opportunities for students to talk about their learning and to use their newly acquired scientific terminology and knowledge. This helps to reinforce their learning and develop understanding.
- Teachers have an appropriate focus on examination technique. They emphasise key aspects of topics for examination answers. Good use is made of past paper questions both in class and for homework.
- Progress monitoring by science teachers is particularly effective. This includes regular individual subject reviews which help students to focus on what they need to do to improve their grades. Marked work is returned extremely rapidly with helpful comments.
- Extremely good use is made of individual minimum target grades to motivate students to strive for the best possible results, and in monitoring their progress.
- The college provides a very good range of advanced level science courses. There are many different science subjects including applied science and geology, and different syllabus options in biology and chemistry.

- Students receive excellent individual support from their science teachers which they value. Teachers willingly give of their time so that help is available for students during their breaks, lunchtimes and study periods. During activities in lessons teachers are adept at monitoring student progress and giving individual help where required.
- There are highly effective pastoral systems which also help to support students and promote high achievement.

Leadership and management

- Leadership and management of science are outstanding.
- Leaders and managers maintain a very strong commitment to raising student achievement and to student centred approaches.
- There are well planned and effective timetabling arrangements which ensure that teachers are freely available to give individual help to students.
- There is a strong focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- Leadership and management have successfully established a culture of continuous improvement. Teachers are reflective and constantly seeking to improve their own practice.
- Self assessment is rigorous and based on very thorough analyses.
- Effective use is made of data, and this includes extremely effective use of value added data.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- to consider how to improve the few laboratories that are very old fashioned and do not provide a modern scientific working environment.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Ruth James
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools