

17 October 2006

Mr Steve Wood
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Dear Mr Wood

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 11 and 12 October 2006. I am grateful to all the science 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 the 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 majority of science courses success, retention and pass rates are very high at both GCE AS level and GCE A level.
- The proportions of students who achieve the highest grades in science subjects are well above those found nationally in sixth form colleges.
- Value added data show that at GCE A level students achieve higher grades than would be expected given their prior attainment at GCSE.

Quality of provision

- Science teachers use a very good range of teaching and learning strategies in lessons. These include a variety of interesting activities including structured worksheets and workbooks, practical and experimental work, molecular model building and group discussions.
- Science teachers are very well qualified, enthusiastic and committed to achieving the best results for their students.
- In lessons there are some good opportunities for students to talk about their learning. This helps to develop their understanding of scientific concepts and specialist vocabulary.
- Some good use is made of student self-assessment, particularly in psychology.
- Very good use is made of information and communications technology in teaching and learning in science. Teachers are particularly skilled in using electronic whiteboards in a variety of ways to enhance their teaching and students' learning.
- High quality learning materials are provided. These are well designed and well structured and help to promote learning.
- There are excellent systems for assessing and monitoring student progress, including individual subject reviews.
- Highly effective use is made of individual 'minimum achievable grades' (MAGs) in motivating students to aim for the best possible grades, and in assessing work and monitoring progress.
- Teachers provide very good support to individual students. Students are able to get help when needed and they value this highly.
- The college pastoral support and learning support systems are highly effective.

Leadership and management

- Leadership and management are outstanding.
- Thorough analyses of data are undertaken, including value added data.
- Leadership and management have successfully created a culture which encourages teachers to constantly seek to improve. Teachers are enthusiastic about developing new ideas which will benefit their students.
- Leaders and managers promote a strong focus on the quality of teaching and learning and student centred approaches.
- There is much sharing of good practice in teaching and learning through both formal and informal mechanisms.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- act upon the evidence from value added data, which shows that for a minority of GCE AS level science subjects, although students generally

achieve grades in line with expectations, they do not do quite as well as those completing full GCE A level courses

- raise the retention rates for the second year of the GCE A level courses in physics and geology, which were not as high as in previous years.

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