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Dear Mr Hill

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science and English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit with Patricia Walker on 12 - 13 March 2007 to look at work in science and English.

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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons.

Science

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be good, but with some aspects that require attention.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in science are good.

- Achievements at the end of Key Stage 2 are good, although both attainment and progress show a decline over the last three years.
- Achievement in Years 7 and 8 is good.
- The standards of pupils' work in lessons are good, although the progress made during lessons is widely variable in both key stages.

Quality of teaching and learning in science

The overall quality of teaching and learning in science is good.

- All lessons have some very good features, such as: the relationships teachers have with their classes, teachers' good use of their subject knowledge to plan appropriate activities and provide clear explanations, the extensive use of practical work with a good focus on developing pupils' skills.
- Pupils in both key stages are enthusiastic about science and work with interest. It was uplifting to see such 'awe and wonder' in the faces of the children in two Year 5 classes, and the enthusiasm of a Year 6 class linking work on forces to both drama and literacy through their 'news stories about an incident involving forces'.
- Most teachers have very good skills in using questioning to engage pupils and to use their responses to develop teaching points; for example, in a Year 7 class to explore the differences between elements, compounds and mixtures.
- Teaching is less effective in developing pupils' skills in scientific reasoning, particularly in making predictions and in drawing conclusions. Very little attention is given to the *Ideas and Evidence in Science* strand of the programme of study to develop pupils' understanding of the links between explanations, experiments and evidence.
- Much practical activity is teacher directed and uses a very narrow range of starting points for the activities.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The arrangements for science in Years 5 and 6 are sensible and make best use of the expertise of teachers. Good attention is given to investigative approaches to science.
- The schemes of work for Years 7 and 8 ensure full coverage of the programme of study and prepare pupils well for Year 9 in the upper school.
- Too little account is taken of progression from the science covered in Years 5 and 6 to that in Years 7 and 8. There is significant repetition with a lack of indication of the progress that is expected. There is a marked difference in emphasis, particularly in relation to the approach to investigative work.
- The curriculum is planned well to provide interim summative judgements, and to provide pupils with a clear indication of their current and target levels. However, more attention needs to be given to monitoring progress during lessons, and through short sequences of lessons, in both key stages.

Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management of science are good.

- Science is managed well in both key stages. The science coordinators for Key Stage 2 and 3 have good subject knowledge that they use well to support other teachers. They have good relationships with partner first schools and the upper school to coordinate work in science.
- The curriculum is generally managed well. Good medium and long-term planning leads to schemes of work that provide teachers with a secure framework and ensure consistency in what is taught. This is particularly important in Key Stage 2 where there are fourteen classes. However, planning for progression is weaker.
- The use of data for pupil tracking and target setting is managed well.
- Whilst extensive use is made of data for monitoring pupils' progress, the analysis of data is used less well to identify what is working well and what needs to be further developed or improved.
- Both science coordinators have insufficient time for their leadership and management role. This is less an issue in Key Stage 3, with only two specialist teachers, but is significant in Key Stage 2. The coordinator is unable to monitor the quality of teaching and learning in lessons to support self-evaluation in science.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in science is satisfactory.

- There are no significant groups where achievement differs from that overall.
- Good use is made of a dedicated full-time teaching assistant in science in Key Stage 3. In Key Stage 2 classes, teaching assistants are deployed well to support a range of pupils in science.
- Gifted and talented pupils are particularly well catered for in science.
- Teaching is often planned around the activities to be completed, rather than the learning that should take place. This leads to a lack of differentiation and monitoring progress in some lessons, and the needs of individual pupils are not always well catered for. In some classes, pupils are not clear about what they are expected to do to improve.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- placing more emphasis on developing pupils' skills in scientific reasoning
- planning for better progression through Year 5 to Year 8
- improving formative assessment
- monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in lessons to support better focused self-evaluation in science.

English

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in English are satisfactory

- Standards in English on entry to the school are below average. There is an above average number of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities.
- Over recent years the percentage of pupils reaching level 4 in national tests has fluctuated and in 2006 fell to below average. The percentage at level 5 rose but remained below average. Overall, standards at the end of Key Stage 2 are below average in national tests.
- Data produced by the school indicates that pupils who left the school at the end of Year 8 in 2006 were on track to reach average standards in national testing one year later.
- During the visit standards seen were average in both key stages and progress was satisfactory overall. Speaking and listening is a strength, although many pupils are hampered by having a limited vocabulary.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory

- Teachers plan a range of activities which generally engage pupils' interest.
- Teachers make effective use of discussion to enhance pupils' progress.
- When teachers give pupils the opportunity to work with others they make good progress.
- When teachers do not plan lessons to meet the needs of all pupils this impedes progress.
- Lesson planning does not place enough emphasis on the learning which is to take place.
- Marking of work encourages pupils but does not offer enough advice.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- Long term planning and schemes of work are set out clearly and offer teachers a degree of flexibility.
- At both key stages the curriculum offers satisfactory breadth and balance.
- Much of the lesson planning for Key Stage 3 was produced some years ago and needs to be updated.
- In Key Stage 3 some units are planned well to appeal to boys' interests.
- Planned links with other subject areas enhance the curriculum.

- There is insufficient planning for the use of ICT at both key stages.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management in English are satisfactory.

- There are clear procedures for tracking pupils' progress in Key Stage 2 but this is not as effective in Key Stage 3.
- In Key Stage 2 there is a satisfactory policy in place to boost pupils' achievement.
- There are also clear systems to make pupils aware of what they need to do to improve.
- In both key stages there are recently introduced and appropriate strategies to narrow the gap in attainment between boys and girls.
- There are insufficient lesson observations in Key Stage 3. Lesson observations in Key Stage 2 do not make judgements on the quality of learning which has taken place.
- Both recently appointed key stage subject leaders lack confidence in the use of performance data.

Provision for poetry

Provision for poetry is satisfactory

- The curriculum makes adequate provision for poetry.
- Pupils express more enthusiasm for writing poetry than for studying it.
- There is appropriate evidence on display and in books of the pupils' own poetry, which is enhanced by links with other subjects.

Inclusion

The quality of inclusion is satisfactory

- There are effective strategies in place to improve the enthusiasm and attainment of boys although at present there is a disparity between the attainment of boys and girls in Key Stage 2.
- Assessment information is not used in lesson planning to meet the needs of pupils across the attainment range.
- Teaching assistants give satisfactory support to pupils with LDD.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to enhance provision by sharing effective practice across the key stages
- to improve teaching by placing stronger emphasis on the learning which is to take place rather than the activities which are to be carried out

- to analyse performance and tracking data so that trends and comparisons can be more accurately identified.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop science and English 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 Sage
Her Majesty's Inspector