

12 February 2007

Mr M C Tweedle
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Dear Mr Tweedle

Ofsted Subject and Survey Inspection Programme 2005/06

Sector Skills Area 2: Science post-16

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 1-2 February 2007. 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.

Good practice

Achievement and standards

- Examination results for GCE AS and A level science courses are very good. Pass rates are high. In 2006 all GCE A level science subjects had pass rates of 100%. High proportions of students achieved A and B grades. GCE AS level science courses also have high pass rates and above average percentages of students achieve A and B grades.

- Value added data show that for most courses students achieve grades which are broadly in line with expectations based on their GCSE results. In physics GCE A level students achieved better than predicted grades between 2003 and 2005, but in 2006 results were in line with predictions. In GCE A level chemistry results in 2006 were better than expected.
- Attendance in both Year 12 and Year 13 is excellent.
- Students' behaviour, both in lessons and around the school, is excellent.

Quality of provision

- Teaching and learning are consistently good, and many lessons are very good.
- Students display excellent attitudes to learning, which are fostered by teachers working hard to create a learning culture.
- Teachers explanations and exposition and clear.
- Lessons include a good range of activities which engage interest, and reinforce learning.
- There are some good opportunities for students to talk about their learning, and to practise using the specialist terminology, particularly in biology and psychology.
- Information and communications technology are used well in teaching and learning. In lessons some good use of interactive whiteboards was observed. The use of datalogging equipment enhances experimental work. In psychology, internet linked computers are used in lessons to assist students with research. Useful materials and links to relevant internet sites are given to students and are available through the school website.
- Learning materials are very good. Handbooks, notes, worksheets, practical instructions and other materials are well designed and informative. They help to develop students' skills, knowledge and understanding.
- A good feature of the curriculum is the introduction of the new GCE AS and A level 'Advancing Physics' courses, designed to encourage more students to study physics post-16 and to provide a different and more contemporary approach.
- Support for students is good. Subject teachers provide subject specific support both within and outside timetabled lessons, and students value this. In chemistry, for example, regular extra lessons are offered to help students understand particular topics.
- Inclusion is very good. The sixth form accepts students from local 11-16 schools with suitable GCSE qualifications, as well as Heckmondwike Grammar students. Students from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds study sciences in a harmonious learning environment.

Leadership and management

- Leadership and management of all the sciences are very good.

- Subject self-evaluations are thorough, and include detailed analyses of results. Appropriate action plans are in place.
- The leadership of chemistry has led to an improvement in the value added for GCE A level chemistry in 2006.
- Effective leadership and management have enabled students to obtain very good examination results, which has led to more students studying science post-16. Numbers have grown significantly in recent years.
- Science teachers are well qualified, committed, conscientious and enthusiastic. Good teamwork exists in the different subjects. Technician support is also very good.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- improve science accommodation. There is a shortage of laboratories for the number of students. Chemistry laboratories are old and dilapidated and do not provide a modern scientific learning environment
- continue to develop strategies to support underachieving students so that more achieve or exceed their expected grades and value added increases
- continue to develop teaching, learning and assessment to even further improve the good practice that exists, and so improve progress further.

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 LA 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