

08 December 2006

Mrs J Judson
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Dear Mrs Judson

Ofsted Subject and Survey Inspection Programme 2006/07

Sector Skills Area: 2 Science and mathematics post-16

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 2 and 3 November 2006. I am grateful to the 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 staff and also to 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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work, observation of six lessons and analysis of the 2006 examination results.

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 observed

Achievement and standards

- Students' achievements have been high over the past three years. In 2006 the A level pass rate was 100% for biology, 98% for chemistry and 97% for physics. At AS the pass rate was 98% in biology, 97% in chemistry and 96% for physics. The proportion of students awarded A and B grades was over half in biology and chemistry and well over

two thirds in physics. In addition creditable results were achieved in both psychology and the Public Understanding of Science.

- Progression from AS to A2 has improved steadily over three years and in 2006 over three quarters of the students taking AS sciences progressed on to the A2.
- Over the past three years students in physics have made progress above that expected from their prior attainment. All the other subjects have positive ALIS residuals but not significantly above what might be expected.

Teaching and learning

- All the lessons observed were good with some very good features. One lesson was graded outstanding. Experienced and approachable teachers prepared well for their lessons and confidently used IT and directed questions to develop students' understanding. There was some excellent use of demonstration experiments to inform and stimulate discussion. Students make very good progress with their studies.
- Assessment is rigorous and assignments are regularly set and marked promptly. Students' files are up to date and checked regularly by teaching staff. Tracking and monitoring of students' progress is a key strength of the science team; as are the study workshops and enrichment activities which the students can access. For example, the Nuffield bursary scheme has resulted in interesting and challenging projects for some students.
- Students are enthusiastic users of ILT. In one case PowerPoint was successfully used to produce a simple but effective animation of cell division. In another, a skilful student used a variety of media techniques to produce a compelling animated presentation of inhibitors in chemistry.
- Progression from the sixth form is good. In 2006 over 80% of Year 13 students either went straight to university or took a gap year before going on. Most of the remainder went on to further education or to employment with training.
- Science subjects, including psychology recruit well. Students can broaden their studies by taking AS Public Understanding of Science. Personal support for students is good and one student commented, "We are encouraged to aim high".

Leadership and management

- The science teams are very well led and managed. The day to day management of teaching, tracking and monitoring, arranging enrichment activities and sharing good practice is well organised. The self evaluation report for the sciences is a thorough and detailed document and is accompanied by sensible development plans.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- a minority of teaching does not always meet the full range of students' needs and abilities; although students are competent users of IT, there was little use of IT in lessons during the visit
- the science self evaluation document is lengthy and descriptive in parts; some of the data on achievements could be more succinctly analysed and in other areas targets are not specific enough to lead to measurable outcomes.

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

Alex Falconer
Her Majesty's Inspector