

06 March 2007

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Dear Dr Godfrey

Ofsted Subject and Survey Inspection Programme 2006/07

Sector Skills Area 2: Science post-16

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 27 and 28 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 observed

Achievement and standards

- 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.
- In 2006 most science subjects had pass rates of 95% or more at GCE A level. For GCE AS level, most science subjects had pass rates of 90% or more.

- For many science subjects the proportions of students who achieve the highest grades are well above those found nationally in sixth form colleges.
- Value added data show that for most GCE AS and A level science subjects students achieve higher grades than would be expected given their prior attainment at GCSE.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes to learning are outstanding.

Quality of provision

- The quality of provision in science is outstanding.
- Teaching and learning are consistently of very high quality. All observed lessons were at least good and many were very good.
- Teachers are well qualified and knowledgeable. They have high expectations and they successfully convey their enthusiasm for their subjects to their students.
- Teachers use a very good range of teaching and learning activities in lessons. These include well planned practical and experimental work, demonstrations, video clips and animations, worksheets and other exercises which require students to think, discuss and work out problems for themselves. Particularly good use is made of question and answer to check understanding.
- Lessons are very well paced and structured so that no time is wasted and students are learning all the time.
- Teachers' explanations and exposition are very clear. Care is taken to emphasise and explain scientific terms and to reinforce the use of specialist scientific language.
- Teachers know their students well and are sensitive to individual needs. Most teachers are adept at monitoring individual students' work in lessons, ensuring that the more able are appropriately challenged, and the less able are not left behind.
- Learning materials are of very high quality.
- The use of information and communications technology (ICT) in teaching and learning is improving. In lessons teachers make use of electronic whiteboards, presentations, and data logging. Useful subject materials are available on the virtual learning environment (VLE) and students are directed to appropriate websites. Physics students are given a CD with good summary notes and questions.
- Assessment is very well planned. Students have regular tests and are well prepared for external examinations. Good advice is given to students who are considering resitting module examinations to improve their grades.
- Homework is set regularly, marked with helpful comments and returned promptly.
- Examination requirements are given rigorous attention, and students have plenty of opportunity to practise past paper questions.

- Excellent use is made of minimum target grades (and aspirational grades) to motivate students to achieve their best, and to monitor their progress.
- There is a very good range of courses at GCE AS and A level, including geology and environmental science. At level 2, GCSE courses in environmental science and psychology offer students different options from those usually studied at high school.
- Subject specific support for students is excellent. As well as timetabled lunchtime workshops with compulsory attendance for those who need it, teachers offer additional revision sessions. Teachers also give freely of their time to help students with individual difficulties. Students value this highly.
- The college's arrangements for learning support and the pastoral system are highly effective.

Leadership and management

- Leadership and management are outstanding.
- Leaders and managers focus strongly on raising achievement and continuous improvement.
- There are thorough analyses of data and examination results, including value added data.
- Self assessment is highly effective. There is meticulous attention to areas for development.
- Day to day operational management is highly effective.
- Within subjects there is very strong teamwork which helps to ensure that newer teachers are well supported and students' experiences are consistent, whichever teacher they have.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- value added data show that for GCE AS and A level physics, students do not do quite as well as in other science subjects; they generally achieve grades in line with expectations based on their GCSE results
- retention rates for GCE AS psychology, although improving, are slightly below national averages.

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