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25 May 2007

Mr Hulme
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hulme

Ofsted survey inspection programme – science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 23 - 24 May 2007 to look at work in science

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 five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Standards in science are broadly average and achievement is satisfactory.

- Standards at the end of Year 9 have been rising in science over the past few years. Standards in 2006 were broadly average. The progress of students during Key Stage 3 is satisfactory.
- Standards in 2006, as measured by the percentage of students achieving A* - C grades at the end of Year 11, were below the national average. As a result the department has focussed on improving coursework grades, and providing targeted support for those students at the grade C / D boundary. The department's effective tracking system and inspection evidence indicate that standards are rising and progress is now satisfactory.
- Girls and boys make similar progress in science during Key Stage 4.
- The standards achieved by students in biology, chemistry and physics at GCE 'AS' and 'A' level are below the national average. Given the starting point of students on these courses this represents satisfactory progress.

- Students enjoy science, particularly the practical side of the subject. During all the lessons observed students showed good attitudes to learning and good behaviour.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- There is some good teaching within science but the quality across the department is too varied.
- Where teaching is good, teachers provide students with clear explanations and make effective use of interactive white boards to aid learning.
- Lesson objectives are shared with students although not always clearly explained.
- In the best lessons activities are pitched at the right level and a range of teaching strategies are employed to actively engage students. They are given the opportunity to discuss ideas and work collaboratively to improve their learning.
- In some lessons there is an over emphasis on a lecturing style of teaching. There is little opportunity for students to take responsibility for their own learning as they are passive and are not actively engaged. The level of work is pitched at the average ability of the class and is not appropriate for all students.
- There is little opportunity for students to use information and communication technology (ICT) in science particularly the use of data loggers.
- Students know their targets and how well they are doing. They say they find the academic review days helpful in this respect.
- The quality of marking is variable. Some teachers mark books well providing helpful comments for students. However, this good practice is not yet consistent across the department. As a consequence students are not always clear about what they have to do to improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The Key Stage 3 scheme of work covers the requirement of the National Curriculum.
- Lesson plans within the Key Stage 3 scheme of work contain differentiated learning objectives. However, strategies to ensure differentiation are not always clear. The department has recognised this as an area in need of development.
- There is a clear strategy for the teaching of scientific investigations and this is integrated into the scheme of work.
- The department has chosen to offer a double award GCSE course to all students in Key Stage 4. There was a clear rationale to choosing this course. The department felt its contextual, applied approach and assessment style would engage and motivate students at the school. A triple award science course is also available for more able students.
- Post 16 provision within the school is based around academic science 'A' levels. However, level 2 and level 3 vocational courses in science are available to students through local consortium arrangements.
- After school science clubs are run and a Saturday morning surgery is made available for students to improve their coursework.

Leadership and Management

Leadership and management in science are satisfactory.

- The department has been without a second in science for extended periods of time since the last inspection. This has had a negative impact on the leadership and management capacity of the department.
- Self evaluation is good and the department is aware of its strengths and weaknesses. The department's development plan links well with the school's development plan. Key areas for improvement have been identified but success criteria are not sufficiently measurable
- The head of science and the senior leadership team monitor teaching and learning well. They are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching within the department. Some strategies have been implemented to support and share good practice but this remains an area in need of development.
- The monitoring of marking lacks sufficient rigour to ensure consistency of practice across the department.
- Students are set challenging targets and good procedures are in place to monitor their progress towards these targets. The rigour of this system has recently been developed and it is beginning to have a positive impact on students' progress.
- Recently introduced systems used to monitor and support the production of students' coursework are beginning to bring about improvement.

Inclusion

Provision for inclusion is good.

- Students enjoy science and they report that they are well supported if they have difficulty with their learning.
- Teachers effectively use questioning to ensure that all students are engaged with learning.
- The department monitors the progress of different ethnic minority groups well. Students of Black Caribbean heritage make slightly less progress than other groups of students. The department is aware of this issue and effective action is improving the progress made by these students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the overall quality of teaching in science by developing effective systems of sharing good practice
- developing the independent learning skills of students by more actively involving them in their learning
- ensuring that all marking gives students clear and helpful advice about how to improve their learning
- ensuring all teachers make effective use of data to pitch the level of work at an appropriate standard for all students
- improve the provision and use of ICT, particularly data loggers, in science activities.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop science 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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Peter Sanderson
Her Majesty's Inspector