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Mr Mann
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Mann

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, when Joy Frost HMI and I visited the school on 30-31 October 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 nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Overall standards and achievement are satisfactory.

- While standards attained by pupils in Key Stage 3 tests are significantly above average, the progress they make during Key Stage 3 is below average.
- Comparison with similar schools shows low levels of achievement in Key Stage 3 tests in 2005 and 2006, the last complete year for which validated data are available.
- The school's data for Key Stage 3 tests in 2007 shows an improvement in performance with 57% of pupils reaching Level 6 or above compared with 49% in 2006.
- There are no validated results available for GCSE in 2007, but the school's own analysis shows success rates in science to be slightly below the average for other subjects.

- The targets that have been set for improvement are demanding but are appropriate for pupils who, overall, enter the school with above average standards.
- Particularly in Key Stage 3 lessons should be more demanding and teachers' expectations should be higher.

Quality of teaching and learning of science

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

- Almost half of the lessons observed were outstanding in the quality of teaching and no lessons were inadequate.
- Lessons are consistently well planned using the departmental model which ensures objectives-led planning, with success criteria that enable the success of teaching to be evaluated.
- There is a good range of teaching activities which are well matched to lesson objectives.
- There is a good balance of activities including practical work, discussion, scientific enquiry, role play, demonstration, exposition, with ICT being used well by teachers to present information and stimulate interest.
- There is inconsistency in marking of work, particularly in Key Stage 3. There is some good formative comment but the setting of 'next step' targets is not often seen, nor is there evidence of pupils having to respond to teachers' comments.
- Marking of Key Stage 4 work contains more formative comments and these provide challenge and show pupils how they can improve.
- The newly introduced target setting and monitoring system should form the basis of increased expectations of teachers and provide a closer monitoring of pupil performance focussed on the needs of individuals.
- All the science teachers are working to a common understanding of what contributes to a good science education.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The school offers a very good range of science courses in Key Stage 4 to ensure there are good pathways available to all pupils and to meet a range of needs.
- The choices that pupils have are not constrained, and a range of academic and vocational courses are available to all; these include applied science, additional science and the three separate sciences.
- Curriculum planning is complex with such a range of courses and it is a considerable achievement of the school to provide this level of choice.
- Good provision for extra-curricular activity is made in, for example, the science club and in after school sessions leading to astronomy GCSE.

Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management in science are good.

- The head of department provides very good leadership and management which are appreciated by his science colleagues.
- He has a clear vision of the improvement that should be made and has an outstanding overview of what factors are necessary to promote good learning in science.
- The self-evaluation of the department is accurate and thorough. It has identified clearly areas for improvement, and good development planning sets out the path to improvement well.
- Key steps forward have been made through the introduction of objective led schemes of work, clear strategies for differentiation, ensuring a variety of teaching, improving assessment for learning and introducing systematic target setting, monitoring, and evaluation.
- The use of the target setting and monitoring procedures is not yet consistent and not all teachers are using the system to inform their planning and to focus on individual pupil's needs.

Inclusion

Provision for inclusion is good.

- Lesson observations did not show any difference in the ways different groups are given the opportunity to learn.
- The school is monitoring the performance of different groups to ensure their provision is inclusive.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising the expectations of teachers and the challenge to pupils, particularly in Key Stage 3
- ensuring that the monitoring and tracking system has challenging targets for pupils that are changed in response to pupils' performance
- securing teachers' understanding of how they use targets and tracking to inform their planning
- ensuring that pupils do not repeat work but any re-visiting of areas of knowledge takes the form of new challenges which provoke new learning
- developing peer observation and other effective ways of sharing good practice.

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

Ian Richardson
Her Majesty's Inspector