

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr M Gallacher
Headteacher
The Billingham Primary School
Fen Road
Billinghay
Lincoln
LN4 4HU

Dear Mr Gallacher

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 4 December 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 yourself, the subject leader for science, and with pupils from Years 5 and 6, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of five part lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in science is satisfactory. Standards are broadly average.

- The school has a legacy of low standards and achievement in science by the end of Key Stage 2.
- Standards in science at Year 6 have improved significantly in the last two years, since the arrival of the new science subject manager.
- Progress in the lessons observed was satisfactory, overall, although good progress was observed in some lessons.
- Children in the Foundation Stage receive a good grounding in the science skills they will need later, such as in close observation and placing objects into categories by their properties.
- Pupils generally enjoy science.

Quality of teaching and learning of science

The quality of teaching and learning in science is satisfactory.

- Teachers have adequate subject knowledge in science.
- Teachers' relationships with pupils are good and lessons are practical, with different levels of challenge for pupils of different abilities.
- The language of science is promoted well. This is especially important for Billingham pupils, many of whom enter the school with below average levels of language development.
- Too much of pupils' work is recorded on worksheets from commercial schemes of work. Pupils do not have sufficient opportunity, therefore, to record for themselves. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly, but marking does not often help signpost how pupils could improve.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the science curriculum is satisfactory.

- Good progress has been made in the last two years to make the science curriculum broad, balanced and more relevant to children. Science investigations now form a significant part of the curriculum.
- There are good cross-curricular links between science and other subjects, such as drama and physical education.
- Enjoyment and enrichment of science is promoted successfully through visits to places of local interest and scientific significance, such as to the home of Sir Isaac Newton, Woolsthorpe Hall near Grantham.
- However, there is further scope to consider what this distinctive part of England has to offer by way of science, and to plan a curriculum that exploits the opportunities the region presents to the full.
- Resources for science within the school are inadequate to allow pupils to undertake investigations. Teachers are too dependent on the local secondary school for quite basic science equipment.

Leadership and management of science

The leadership and management of science are good.

- The subject leader for science has faced considerable difficulties in developing science, not least inadequate resources. Significant progress has been made in raising the profile of science, and standards at Year 6, in the past two years.
- Considerable, effective support has been provided by an external adviser.
- A good partnership has been forged with the science department in the local secondary school.
- There are clear plans for further development, principally based on improved assessment and analysis. However, plans for monitoring the quality of teaching await the funding to allow this to take place.

Inclusion

Inclusion in science is satisfactory.

- Pupils who find learning science difficult are provided for well through extra support from teaching assistants. Teachers often plan separate work that is carefully matched to the abilities of these pupils. However, teachers do not include these pupils sufficiently frequently in lessons, and therefore do not involve them as fully as they might.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- reducing the dependency of teachers on commercially produced worksheets so that pupils can build the skills of recording for themselves
- making better use of the opportunities within the region to learn about science
- monitoring the quality of teaching in science lessons
- improving resources for science.

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

Brian Padgett
Her Majesty's Inspector