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Mr R Holman  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Holman

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 5-6 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 staff and learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of seven lessons

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Standards in science are average and achievement is satisfactory.

- Students enter the school in Year 9 with broadly average standards in science although standards in literacy are below expected levels.
- Standards at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 fell slightly in 2007, although they remain broadly average.
- The department's tracking system and observations made during this inspection indicate that standards are now rising again in Years 9 to 11.
- The progress of students through the school is satisfactory.
- Students reach standards similar to the national average on post 16 science courses. The overall progress made by students on these courses is satisfactory, although they make good progress in chemistry.
- The science curriculum makes a satisfactory contribution to students' personal development. Most students behave well and work together cooperatively in teams when completing practical tasks or group activities.

However, a few lessons are affected by the low level disruptive behaviour of a small minority of students.

### Quality of teaching and learning of science

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

- Lessons observed during this inspection ranged in quality from good to inadequate.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and provide students with clear explanations. This aids their learning.
- Most teachers plan lessons well and the three part lesson structure is well established within the department.
- Most lessons have a range of interesting activities that engage students. However, in a few lessons when planned activities fail to engage students the lesson can be disrupted by the behaviour of some students and this affects the rate of learning of the whole class.
- Most teachers give students good support, particularly in the sixth form.
- In some lessons teachers are giving too much information to students rather than providing them with opportunities to find things out for themselves. This inhibits the development of their independent learning skills.
- Students are aware of their targets and how well they are doing. Some teachers mark work well and give good advice to students about how to improve. However, this good practice is not consistent across the department and so students are not always aware of what they must do to improve their work.

### Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- There are good links with associated middle schools. This ensures that students cover the full Key Stage 3 programme of study between Years 7 to 9.
- Schemes of work clearly identify opportunities to develop students' skills of scientific enquiry. This ensures continuity in the development of these skills across year groups.
- Schemes of work provide useful advice about how to plan work so that it meets the needs of all students in the school.
- The broad range of science courses offered in Years 10 and 11 meet the needs and interests of students well.
- The science courses offered in the sixth form build well on those offered in Years 10 and 11. The uptake of students onto post 16 science courses is good.
- The department offers a satisfactory range of science clubs, trips and visits.

### Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management in science are satisfactory.

- The leadership team have identified the need to strengthen and broaden leadership and management in science by appointing a head of science to work with the science college manager from January 2008.
- The department has good systems of self evaluation. The science college manager is well aware of the department's strengths and weaknesses. The areas in need of improvement are well addressed in the department's development plan.
- Challenging targets are set for students in science. This reflects the department's high expectations for students.
- The department has a good central system for tracking students' progress towards their targets. However, individual subject leaders do not use this assessment information with equal rigour to identify underachieving students and put in place suitable support.
- The monitoring of marking lacks sufficient rigour.

## Inclusion

Provision for inclusion is satisfactory.

- All groups of students make similar satisfactory progress in science.
- Teachers are encouraging and supportive of all students.
- Teaching assistants provide satisfactory support to some individuals and small groups in lessons.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring all lessons contain interesting activities that engage students and provide them with more opportunities to develop their independent learning skills
- requiring that all subject leaders make effective use of assessment information to identify underachieving students and provide effective support
- ensuring that the marking of work is helpful and informs students about how to improve.

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