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Mr Hoare  
Headteacher  
Finchley Catholic School for Boys  
Woodside Lane  
Finchley  
London  
N12 8TA

Dear Mr Hoare

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 16–17 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 good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory

- Standards have improved at Key Stage 3 over the past three years and are good. Progress, as indicated from added value analyses, is satisfactory.
- At Key Stage 4 achievements are satisfactory and while GCSE double science results declined in 2006, they improved in 2007. Triple science GCSE results are above the national average. Added value data show that progress at Key Stage 4 is satisfactory.
- In the sixth form the GCE A level results for physics and biology are good but A level chemistry results declined in 2007. AS results in physics and chemistry declined in 2007 but this was not so in biology.
- Overall Year 13 students make better progress than those in Year 12.
- Standards of class work and practical investigations are good. Written work is of a satisfactory standard and, on the whole, the students show interest in science lessons.

## Quality of teaching and learning of science

Teaching and learning are good.

- Nine lessons were observed and the quality judged to be very similar to the profile for lesson observation in the school's quality documentation. No unsatisfactory lessons were observed.
- Science teachers are well qualified and confident in managing their classes. Behaviour is good and the boys feel that the teachers are helpful and approachable.
- The students were highly articulate about their experiences in science. They all spoke positively about the range of activities, some practical, some written and some role play that they had experienced over the past few days. However, they do not like copying from the board or from books.
- Lessons are well prepared and teachers make good use of information communication technology (ICT). Students reported that they all had at least one opportunity to use ICT to prepare a presentation in science over the past year.
- Science teachers have high expectation of their students and make good use of directed questions. They give the students time to think and involve the students in discussions about the implications of their studies in a wider context.
- In a minority of lessons the teachers talked for too long and the students were passive; only one activity was prepared and some students lost interest half way through the lesson.
- Assessment is good and developing. Students were confident that they had clear targets to aim for.
- Exercise books and files are marked regularly and usually contain helpful comments on how to improve. However, some marking is mechanical and there is less evidence of follow up to ensure that corrections have been made.
- The key stage co-ordinators and the head of science have recently focussed on improving coursework submitted for public examinations. Good progress has been made and staff are now more consistent in complying with deadlines and in grading finished work.
- Science teachers are working more closely together to track and monitor students' progress. There is less evidence of sharing tracking evidence for students in the sixth form.

## Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the science curriculum in meeting the needs of the students is good.

- The science curriculum at Key Stage 3 and 4 is broad and balanced and meets the needs of the students. The range of options in Years 10 and 11 allow students to study relevant science courses that meet the range of their abilities.
- The curriculum in the sixth form consists of the three traditional subjects; biology, chemistry and physics. The science team are

currently considering some AS options such as the Public Understanding of Science or Science in Society in order to widen choice in the sixth form.

## Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management in science are good

- The science department is well led by a hard working head of department who has the confidence of the science team. Her example of extra support for Key Stage 3 students last year has the respect of the team.
- Key Stage 3 and 4 coordinators have recently been appointed and are working with the head of department to bring more consistency into the work of science teachers.
- Staff are well qualified and some recent appointments have strengthened the team.
- Staff development is well organised and relevant to identified needs.
- Specialist science resources are satisfactory. The laboratories, although old, are fit for purpose with one exception. Around 10% of all science lessons across the school take place in general classrooms which limits practical investigations and use of ICT.
- Quality assurance is good. The science team is self critical and the review documents scrutinised were evaluative and contained sensible targets.
- The head of department has rightly identified the need to focus on developing more consistent practice across the team.

## Inclusion

Inclusion is outstanding. This is a key strength of the school.

- Transition from Key Stage 2 is well organised and successfully helps the boys settle into secondary education.
- Considerable time and attention has been devoted to supporting boys in Key Stage 3 and helping them make the transition to Key Stage 4 study.
- The special educational needs coordinator, together with science teachers and teaching assistants provide very good support for students found to be making slow progress with their targets.
- An intervention team worked hard last year to support students in Key Stage 3 who had become disengaged. This work is currently being extended into Key Stage 4.
- All students get accurate and objective careers advice and those not choosing to stay on past year 11 are well supported in making choices that are right for them. The school makes good use of Connexions personal advisors.
- A successful initiative to prevent exclusion in year 9 has now been extended to include pupils in years 7 and 8.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising achievements in AS sciences
- ensuring that all science lessons contain interesting and varied activities
- making sure that all marked work contains helpful comments and is followed up to monitor improvements.

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/Local Learning and Skills Council and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Alex Falconer  
Her Majesty's Inspector