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Ms Sydenham  
Headteacher  
The Ellen Wilkinson School for Girls  
Queen's Drive  
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Dear Ms Sydenham

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, when I visited the school on 1-2 November 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be outstanding. In this school the award of specialist science status has had a positive impact on standards and achievement. The school is able to demonstrate improvements in teaching and learning, the curriculum and leadership and management as a consequence of specialist science status.

Achievement and standards

Overall standards and achievement are good.

- Students in Key Stage 3 make significantly better progress than that made by students in similar schools. The school was in the top 10% for this measure in 2006 and standards have improved further in 2007.
- Over the last three years of validated data i.e. from 2005 to 2007 there has been a significant rising trend in the standards achieved by students.
- The school has exceeded, by a good margin, the targets set for Key Stage 3 by external agencies, the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and the Fischer Family Trust (FFT).

- The progress made by students in Key Stage 4 and post-16 is not as strong as in Key Stage 3, but data show attainment at GCSE to be well above the grades predicted by FFT with 64% of students being grades A\* to C overall in science subjects.
- Standards seen in lessons and in a scrutiny of students' work are good; much of the work being of high quality, completed and well presented.
- Students demonstrate positive attitudes to learning, good personal development and excellent behaviour.
- Students are developing into self-confident learners as a consequence of the way they are taught and tutored.

### Quality of teaching and learning of science

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

- The quality of teaching seen was good or better in all lessons. In half of the lessons seen teaching was outstanding.
- The good quality teaching is underpinned by very good planning that incorporates clear learning objectives, suggestions for differentiation, reference to available resources and cross-curricular links.
- The schemes of work are produced to the same high standards and are a consequence of collaborative working.
- Schemes are detailed and supportive, yet not constraining. Staff are encouraged to improve on lesson suggestions through innovation.
- There are high levels of sharing good practice through formal and informal means.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and provide well contextualised and relevant lessons for students that they respond to positively.
- Lessons are well resourced and involve a good range of learning activities well matched to purpose.
- Overall teachers are skilled at using Information communication and technology for presenting information and stimulating students' engagement, students rarely use computers and electronic sensing in science lessons.
- The high quality teaching is contributed to significantly by a skilled team of technicians.

### Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

- The curriculum for Key Stage 3 provides good coverage of the National Curriculum through a range of activities and interesting contexts.
- Much additional support and enrichment is provided through extra curricular activities, in-school events, visits, and clubs including revision and booster sessions.
- The Key Stage 4 curriculum offers a good range of courses that are designed to meet the needs of all students. There are vocational and academic courses including the opportunity to study three separate sciences in curriculum time.

- The post-16 also provides the opportunity to study vocational subjects such as health and social care and applied science with physics, chemistry and biology available at AS and A2.
- The curriculum in science embraces other areas of knowledge and makes clear connections to the development of students' cross-curricular skills.

## Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management in science are outstanding.

- The head of department and colleagues in the different science subjects carry out very thorough analysis of performance data, and this leads to identification of causes of change and planning for improvement.
- Development is thorough and is focussed on key issues for improvement that are justified though the evidence collected.
- Departmental organisation is good at departmental and subject level with clear lines of communication both formal and informal.
- There are high levels of collaboration that underpin the effective development of schemes of work, policy and practice in science.
- Departmental documentation, including records, is detailed and purposeful.
- There are very effective arrangements and planning for transition between each key stage, both on entry to the school and during the journey through the school.
- The inspection revealed no areas for development that had not been identified by the science department.

## Inclusion

Provision for inclusion is outstanding.

- Data describing the performance of different groups do not show significant differences between them.
- Teaching is seen to be inclusive and not to show different access to science education on the basis of factors such as ethnicity or attainment.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing opportunities for peer observation to enhance further the sharing of good practice
- refining the target setting and monitoring system to ensure its focus on individual student's performance and how this is responded to in modifying planning.

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