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Mrs Green
Principle
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Dear Mrs Green

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 22-23 January 2008 to look at work in science.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of science, the visit had a particular focus on transition within and between phases (KS2-KS3-KS4-post16); the range of learning experiences provided; the status and use of scientific enquiry and how science works; the range of science courses offered in Key Stage 4 to meet the needs of all pupils.

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 seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Standards in science are average and achievement is satisfactory.

- Standards at the end of Year 11 improved significantly in 2007. Standards are now similar to the national average, although the percentage of students achieving the higher grades is below average.

- Standards at the end of Year 9 fell in 2007 following two years of improvement. Standards for this year group were below average.
- The department's tracking information and inspection evidence indicates that standards are rising in all year groups. Overall, standards in science are now average and achievement is satisfactory and improving.
- Students speak positively about their science lessons and appreciate the support given to them by their teachers. They particularly like the opportunities provided by the Year 10 and 11 applied science course to develop their independent learning skills.
- Students behave well in lessons and have good attitudes to learning. They carry out practical work in a calm, sensible and safe manner.

Quality of teaching and learning of science

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

- The quality of teaching and learning is improving in science although there is still a large variation in practice across the department.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and most lessons are planned well around clear learning outcomes.
- Teachers are committed, mutually supportive and focused on raising students' achievement.
- In most lessons students are provided with interesting activities that engage and motivate them.
- In some, less effective lessons the pace of learning is too slow and activities are not sufficiently engaging.
- Teachers are provided with good assessment information regarding students' prior attainment. However, this information is not always used well to plan activities that match the abilities of all students, particularly the more able.
- Most teachers mark students' work well and provide helpful advice about how they could improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The courses offered in Years 10 and 11 are very well matched to students' interests, needs and learning styles. The double award applied science course, introduced in September 2006, has played a significant role in raising standards and increasing students' enjoyment of science.
- Courses available in local schools and colleges provide appropriate post 16 progression routes for those students who have taken either the applied or co-ordinated science course in Years 10 and 11.
- The schemes of work in Years 7 to 9 cover the requirements of the National Curriculum.
- Curriculum planning ensures that key concepts are revisited as students progress from one year to the next. This ensures that there is continuity and progression in learning.

- Schemes of work in Years 7 to 9 identify opportunities for students to carry out scientific investigations. However, there is a lack of overall planning for the development of the skills of scientific enquiry in these years.

Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management in science are good.

- The head of science has led improvements in science well. He has established a positive and forward looking science team.
- Changes to the curriculum and improvements in teaching and learning have had a significant impact on raising standards at the end of Year 11.
- Suitably challenging targets are set for students. The progress of students towards these targets is monitored and tracked well in Years 10 and 11. Underachieving students are identified and provided with effective support. The progress of students is tracked in Years 7 to 9 although the process of identifying underachievement and providing support is not as rigorous or effective as that seen in Key Stage 4.
- Procedures for self evaluation have recently been developed and improved and are now good. The head of science has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the department.
- The department development plan identifies the key issues in science that are in need of improvement. There is good delegation of tasks within this plan. However, success criteria are not sufficiently specific or measurable.

Inclusion

Provision for inclusion is good.

- The inclusive nature of the department is demonstrated by the careful consideration that was given to choosing courses in Years 10 and 11 that match the interests, needs and learning styles of students very well.
- The impact of teaching and learning, the curriculum and the organisation of teaching groups on the progress of students is regularly evaluated.
- All groups of students make similar progress in science throughout the school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving teaching and learning by developing strategies to share the good practice that exists within the department
- ensuring that the development of scientific enquiry skills is strategically planned across Years 7 to 9
- developing the system for tracking students progress and identifying underachievement in Years 7 to 9 so that it is as effective as the one used in Years 10 and 11

- ensuring assessment information is used well by teachers to plan activities that provide sufficient challenge for all students, particularly the most able.

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