

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 Best
Headteacher
Beaminster School
Newtown
Beaminster
Dorset
DT8 3EP

Dear Mr Best

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 04 - 05 March 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Standards in science are above average and achievement is good.

- Students enter the school, in Year 7, with standards similar to the national average.
- Standards at the end of Year 9 are well above the national average and above average at the end of Year 11.

- The progress made by students between Years 7 and 11 is very good. The progress made by students between Years 7 to 9 is outstanding but less strong in Years 10 and 11.
- Standards at the end of Years 12 and 13 are similar to the national average. The progress made by students on 'AS' and 'A' Level science courses is satisfactory.
- There are positive relationships between teachers and students in lessons. Students' attitudes to learning and behaviour are good.
- Students show a good awareness of safety issues when carrying out practicals.

Quality of teaching and learning of science

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

- Teachers use their very good subject knowledge to provide students with clear explanations that aid their learning.
- Lessons are planned well around clear learning outcomes that are effectively shared with students.
- Most lessons contain a range of interesting activities that engage and motivate students.
- Teachers make good use of targeted questioning to check and develop students' learning.
- Some lessons are too teacher directed with little opportunity for students to develop their independent learning strategies.
- Good procedures are in place for teachers to regularly assess the progress being made by students.
- Students are aware of their targets and how well they are doing. However, they are not always clear about what they must do to improve.
- There is inconsistency in the marking of students work. Not all work is marked regularly enough and teacher comments do not always give helpful advice to students about how to improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The head of science has dedicated time to develop links with partner primary schools. The range of transition activities in place helps ensure that students move confidently into Year 7 science lessons. This has a positive impact on their enjoyment of science and the progress they make.
- Opportunities for students to develop their skills of scientific enquiry are integrated into schemes of work.
- Students commented positively about the modular science course in Years 10 and 11. They feel the regular feedback on their progress is a motivating factor in their learning.
- Good plans are in place to enable some students to study the three separate sciences from September 2008.

- Science 'A' Level courses are taught jointly with a local secondary school. This curriculum link ensures the cost effective delivery of courses.
- No vocational science course is available to students in Years 10 and 11 or the sixth form.

Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management in science are good.

- The head of science has established a strong team of teachers who are all clearly focussed on ensuring that students enjoy science and make good progress.
- Teaching programmes and resources are extremely well organised and managed.
- Targets in Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and the sixth form are challenging and reflect the high expectations of the department.
- An excellent central system for tracking the progress of students towards their targets is in place.
- Good procedures for monitoring teaching and learning are in place. Good advice is given to teachers about how to improve their practice.
- The monitoring of marking is not sufficiently rigorous to ensure consistency of good practice across the department.

Inclusion

Provision for inclusion is good.

- The high expectations of staff and the positive climate for learning within the science block promotes the learning of all students very well.
- Students speak positively about the help and support they receive from staff.
- All groups of students make similar, good progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- providing more opportunities in lessons for students to develop their independent learning skills
- ensuring that all students are clear about what must do to improve their work
- increasing the rigour of monitoring marking to ensure greater consistency of good practice across the department.

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