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Dr S Burton  
Headteacher  
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Dear Dr Burton

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 24-25 January 2008 to look at work in science.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on teaching and learning 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Standards in science in the sixth form are outstanding and achievements are good. Achievement is good and standards are above average at Key Stages 3 and 4.

- Key Stage 3 attainment declined in 2007 following a period of staff change and shortage.
- Progress from Key Stage 2 to 3 has been good for the past three years.
- At GCSE 88% of students achieved A\* -C grades in 2007 and GCSE attainment has been improving over the past three years.
- Progress from Key Stage 3 to 4 has been good over the past three years.

- Excellent A level results were achieved in 2007. 100% pass rates were achieved in biology, chemistry and physics. The proportion of high grades attained was also very good – between 40% and 60% of candidates were awarded A or B grades.
- Value added data show that students make progress in A level sciences at or above that predicted by their prior attainment.
- Currently the standard of students' work in science is good. Students speak confidently in lessons and they work well individually and in groups.

## Quality of teaching and learning in science

Teaching and learning are good.

- All lessons were well prepared and were characterised by good starter activities and effective plenary conclusions. The aims of lessons were clear and shared with the students.
- Science teachers are confident specialists who work well together to produce detailed schemes of work and interesting and relevant activities for their students. Practical work is well planned and safely carried out.
- The best lessons were characterised by activities that enabled the students to work in a variety of modes and to demonstrate their developing understanding.
- Teachers have good ICT skills and use them effectively in lessons. However, ICT activities for students, such as data logging, are under-developed.
- Differentiated activities are beginning to be developed and the science review noted that this area, along, with assessment for learning were current development priorities. The standard of marking is variable.
- Students' progress is effectively tracked and recorded. Students are reasonably confident of the progress they are making especially at GCSE and in the sixth form.
- Transition is good and well organised and students have ready access to advice and guidance on options and career choices.

## Quality of the curriculum

The science curriculum is good and meets the needs of the students.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is well organised and meets the needs of the students. The scheme of work is rational and has practical work and investigations well embedded.
- At Key Stage 4 most students study GCSE science and additional science and results in year 10 and year 11 are good. The curriculum is well organised and students not only succeed but enjoy their studies.
- A small number of students take vocational courses at a local further education college. In addition the needs of the least able group are appropriately met using GCSE single science.

- The curriculum in the sixth form is traditional. Biology, chemistry and physics are on offer. However, geology, astronomy, psychology and human biology are planned for development in the next four years.
- Enrichment is good and the students spoke positively about trips to the Science museum, Brunel University and to CERN in Switzerland.

## Leadership and management of science

### Leadership and management in science are good

- The sciences are well managed and led. Day to day running is sound, as are the arrangements for technical backup of laboratory work. Science technicians are efficient and effective.
- Safe working practices are in place.
- Schemes of work, reviews and development plans indicate that the teachers are beginning to work as a team and not a group of separate subject specialists. Recent appointments have strengthened the team.
- There is a good range of scientific equipment such as glassware, electrical apparatus and reagents. However, three of the laboratories are old and are not an attractive environment in which to study science. The other laboratories are of a good size and are modern and well appointed.
- The science team is one teacher short for a full complement.
- Development plans are evaluative, clearly set out the key strengths and weaknesses and contain sensible and achievable targets.
- Peer lesson observation in science is under-developed.

## Inclusion

### Inclusion is good

- Pastoral arrangements are good for those who are making poor progress in science and those in danger of exclusion.
- Males and females have equal access to the science curriculum including access to courses in the sixth form.
- Attainment and progress throughout the science curriculum show that no ethnic group, or gender, or ability range makes significantly slower progress than any other.
- Appropriate arrangements are in place for students of lower ability to enable them to access the Key Stage 4 science curriculum.
- The school has a calm, friendly and supportive atmosphere.

### Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising attainment at Key Stage 3
- completing the refurbishment of the laboratories and making sure that staffing levels are complete
- developing assessment for learning, differentiation and peer observation in science.

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

Alex Falconer  
Her Majesty's Inspector