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Mrs A Sands
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Sands

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 10 - 11 March 2008 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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in science are satisfactory.

- Standards are broadly average and improving after a period of underachievement.
- Some of the most able pupils are performing a little below where they ought to, but overall considerably better than in 2007.
- Skills in scientific enquiry are variable, though broadly average. Most pupils predict and explain quite well when they are challenged to do so.
- Pupils' numeracy and information and communication technology skills (ICT) are broadly average. Their literacy skills are inconsistent, with pupils not always explaining their understanding and knowledge with sufficient accuracy in either speech or writing.
- Pupils' personal development is satisfactory, and for many pupils is good.

Quality of teaching and learning of science

The quality of teaching and learning in science is satisfactory.

- Teaching is mostly challenging, but occasionally not focused on the needs of all pupils. This is mainly because assessment and use of data are in their early stages of development. However, assessment is improving, and starting to give a picture of pupils' performance over time so that teachers can plan lessons effectively.
- Lessons are well organised for the most part with clear learning objectives, shared with pupils.
- Marking is satisfactory, although it is inconsistent, sometimes with no guidance on how to improve work. When there is guidance, there is frequently no follow up to ensure pupils follow the advice given.
- Independent learning is limited because lessons are sometimes too tightly directed, with limited opportunities for pupils to plan and carry out their own investigations or research.
- Practical work is normally organised well, although occasionally safety rules are not enforced.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The National Curriculum for science is fully covered and appropriate to the needs of pupils. However, while extension activities are planned, they are not always challenging enough to stretch the most able pupils.
- The curriculum includes a sound range of numeracy and ICT activities that support science, but also reinforce basic skills. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to discuss or write about their scientific knowledge and understanding.
- Occasionally scientific investigations are too controlled by teachers and do not engage pupils in scientific enquiry.
- The links between key stages and other schools are satisfactory, but there is room for further work and the school has started to extend them in both directions, with the associated schools.
- Community links and extra-curricular activities are limited, but the school is aware of this and has plans to develop them, including expanding on already good cross-curricular links with mathematics.

Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management of science are good.

- The new head of department has made a perceptive evaluation of current provision and performance. The drive to improve standards is good and improvements are being made in several areas: schemes of work, enquiry

science, teaching, resources, and in assessment, the weakest area. It is early days, but the impact is already evident in improving progress.

- The quality of training and support for staff is good, focusing on observing good practice and specifically chosen courses and visits to other schools to gain expertise.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is satisfactory.

- All pupils have good access to all aspects of the curriculum.
- Improved assessment is giving rise to work accurately targeted on pupils' needs, but there is need for further improvement in this area.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that work is consistently challenging for the most able pupils
- providing opportunities for pupils to discuss and write about their scientific knowledge and understanding
- improving assessment so that information can be used to track pupils' progress and match work closely to their learning needs
- ensuring that marking is consistent in providing guidance on how pupils can improve their work, and that it is followed up to make sure pupils have responded to advice given
- providing planned opportunities for pupils to work independently, including to design and carry out their own scientific investigations
- making sure that safety procedures are followed rigorously in all practical lessons.

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 Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Ted Wheatley
Additional Inspector