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Mr C Healy  
Headteacher  
Balcarras School  
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Dear Mr Healy

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 2 April 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: discussions with you, the head of department and students, observation of three lessons, scrutiny of documents and scrutiny of students' work.

Features of good practice observed

- The department is extremely well led. The head of science has high expectations for both students' achievement and standards of behaviour. These expectations are effectively shared with all staff within the department.
- The department contains a good balance of subject specialists who work as an effective, cohesive team.
- Good procedures are in place to monitor the quality of teaching and learning. Effective strategies are used to share the good and outstanding practice that exists within the department.
- Creativity in teaching and learning are promoted well by schemes of work which are detailed and supportive but not constraining.
- There are good relationships between teachers and students in lessons. Students are very appreciative, particularly in the sixth form, of the support and encouragement they receive from teachers. This promotes

the excellent attitudes to learning and behaviour seen in lessons during this visit.

- Opportunities to develop students' skills of scientific enquiry are well incorporated into the science curriculum. Students say they enjoy the opportunities to design their own experiments.
- Science is a popular subject within the school and an increasing number of students are choosing to follow 'A' level science courses.
- Procedures for assessing students' work are rigorous and robust. Both topic tests and teacher assessed tasks are used to determine the level of attainment of students. This assessment information is used well by teachers to set work at an appropriately challenging level.
- The department has an excellent central data storage system. Assessment information is stored on this system so that the progress of students can be tracked. Praise and encouragement as well as support are used well to promote students' achievement.
- The achievement of students is very high. The value added measure of achievement in Key Stage 3 has been in the top ten percent of schools nationally for the past three years.
- The school's technology status has been used to improve the information communication technology (ICT) resources within the department. These are used very well by teachers to improve students' learning.
- The department makes very effective use of the school's website to support students' work in science when they are at home. For example, homework tasks and school produced resources are placed on the website and these aid students' learning.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- continuing to review the science curriculum in Key Stage 4 with regards to offering triple science and a vocational option for some students
- ensuring that all marking gives clear and helpful advice to students about how to move to the next level or grade.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop science in the school.

As I explained previously, 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

Peter Sanderson  
Her Majesty's Inspector