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Mrs E M Hinton  
Headteacher  
Ralph Sadleir Middle School  
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Dear Mrs Hinton

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 14 - 15 May 2008 to look at work in science.

As outlined in the initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subjects, the visit had a particular focus to track the impact of recent initiatives and to investigate the need for future developments.

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 pupils' work and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievements in science are good and standards are above average.

- At Key Stage 2 pupils attain good scores in national tests. For the past five years their achievements in science have been above national average. Their progress is also good and the school is ranked in the top 30% of schools.
- Pupils complete the last year of Key Stage 3 at other schools and go on to achieve good results in national tests. However, they achieve good standards in science in Years 7 and 8 whilst at Ralph Sadleir School.
- Pupils' written work is good across both key stages. They record and analyse their findings in a range of different ways and their work

shows good development of skills, knowledge and understanding. Their behaviour is good in science lessons and they cooperate well with each other in group and practical work.

## Quality of teaching and learning in science

The quality of teaching and learning in science is good.

- All four lessons observed were judged to be of a good standard. Lessons are well planned and teachers are confident and experienced.
- There is a good emphasis on a variety of interesting and relevant activities that engage and enthuse the pupils.
- Practical work and investigations are effectively integrated into lessons and are carried out safely. This is a key strength of the science team. Pupils make good progress when they are engaged in planning their investigations, recording the results and drawing appropriate conclusions.
- Teachers make good use of appropriate technology such as interactive whiteboards and data logging sensors to help pupils develop their knowledge and understanding.
- Assessment is good and the science teachers track pupils' progress comprehensively. Pupils are well aware of their progress and speak confidently about their targets. Written work is regularly marked and returned with helpful comments on how to improve. Diagnostic marking and assessment for learning, however, are better developed in Key Stage 3 than in Key Stage 2.
- Access to information and communications technology (ICT) for science lessons is limited and the school has recognised this in the science self-assessment report.

## Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The science curriculum is well planned and gives good coverage of the programmes of study in both key stages. Schemes of work are thorough and comprehensive.
- Investigations in science are well integrated into the schemes of work and pupils' planning and practical skills are well developed.
- The new condensed Key Stage 3 curriculum is well planned and has been successfully introduced to Year 7 pupils this year. Indeed, current attainment data show that Year 7 pupils have made better progress than Year 8 pupils did when they were in Year 7.
- However, around 15 pupils in Year 7 have found the pace of study a challenge. This has been recognised by the science teachers and support is in place. Managers and teachers are currently reviewing the implications of the condensed curriculum and trying to find ways in which subject teams can collaborate to make sure that all pupils make the best progress.
- Enrichment in science is good and the science club meets regularly. The regional science learning centre has been used to help with a

microbes topic and will shortly set up a mobile planetarium in the school.

## Leadership and management in science

Leadership and management are good.

- The science team is well led by an enthusiast who has considerable experience. The team is well organised and there is a good focus on regular and relevant practical work.
- Specialist resources are good and continue to develop. Glassware, chemicals and data loggers are in good supply and are securely stored.
- Three of the four science teachers are science specialists and professional training and updating has been both relevant and appropriately focussed.
- The science laboratory is a satisfactory environment in which to study. The preparation space is too small for the amount and level of investigations that are carried out.
- Transition activities and liaison with primary schools are good. For example Year 4 pupils from associated first schools take part in interesting and fun activities in the summer term of each year.
- The science team's self-assessment is evaluative and thorough. It clearly sets out the key strengths and areas for development. Science staff regularly observed teaching there is a good focus on improving teaching and learning.
- Teachers share assessment data well and documents such as development plans, annual self assessment and schemes of work are up to date and comprehensive.

## Inclusion

Inclusion in science is good.

- The curricula are fully inclusive and focus on relevance and applicability to daily life.
- Boys and girls make very similar progress and those with special educational needs are well supported to achieve up to their potential.
- Pupils from black and minority ethnic backgrounds also make good progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving access to ICT for science lessons
- developing assessment for learning and diagnostic marking in Key Stage 2
- considering the implications of the new condensed curriculum at Key Stage 3 for some learners
- improving the size and configuration of the preparation area.

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