

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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Mrs L Anderson
Headteacher
Gosforth Central Middle School
Great North Road
Gosforth
Newcastle upon Tyne
Tyne and Wear
NE3 1UN

Dear Mrs Anderson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 23-24 June 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, the range of learning experiences provided; the status and use of scientific enquiry and how science works.

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 you and the science subject leader, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Standards are higher than the national average. Achievement overall is good.

- Students' standards have been significantly above the national average for the last five years.
- Students' results in the national science tests in 2007 showed them to be significantly above the average for both Level 4+ and Level 5+.
- The outcomes for science in the Key Stage 2 national test shows the progress made to be not significantly above the national average.

- Progress in science is better than that made by students in mathematics and English.
- The outcomes for groups of students, such as those for gender or ability, are not significantly different and no particular group is making significantly less progress than other students.
- The ethos in the classroom involves students in a range of activities and their skills of independent learning are being developed.
- Involvement in self and peer assessment is helping students to take responsibility for their learning and is promoting personal development.

Quality of teaching and learning of science

Teaching and learning are good.

- The quality of teaching and learning observed was good, with positive relationships and respect between teachers and students.
- Students believe the teaching in Key Stage 3 is outstanding and students in Key Stage 2 believe it to be at least good for most lessons.
- Planning is good, underpinning the good practice in teaching and helping to ensure a good range of activities and experiences for students.
- The principle of active learning is evident in science lessons and teachers have clear expectations of students becoming involved and contributing to lessons.
- Teachers are effective at using questions and answers to keep students engaged and to check on their knowledge and understanding.
- There is good assessment practice and summative and formative forms are well balanced to give a full view of students' progress.
- The Key Stage 3 tracking system helps to set targets for students and allows the individual's needs to be identified and met.
- Good examples of assessment for learning techniques were seen and these are to be strengthened by the introduction of an assessment for learning 'passport' in September.
- There is effective use of information communication and technology (ICT) for presenting information, giving explanations and demonstrations. The whiteboards are used well and interactively so that students show what they know.
- Students' attitudes to work are positive and their behaviour is good.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum provided is good.

- The planning ensures that the requirements of the National Curriculum are met.
- The schemes of work are detailed and supportive of good teaching and are usefully described in terms of learning objectives.
- Individual lesson plans have suggestions for teaching activities, resources, and strategies for differentiation.
- Much of the curriculum content involves relevant and well contextualised science.

- The booster sessions are impacting on raising attainment and provision is made for the gifted and talented through extension activities.
- Science is enhanced by residential visits to sites of scientific interest for Years 5, 6 and 8.
- There is a good focus on scientific enquiry (Sc1) which is well balanced with theoretical work.

Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management of science are good.

- The work of the department is effectively supported by a good range of documentation covering policies and practice.
- The level of collaboration in the department is good.
- The self-evaluation carried out in science is of high quality.
- Effective quality assurance procedures contribute to the generally consistent good provision.
- The systems for monitoring and target setting are good particularly at Key Stage 3.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards and achievement, particularly in Key Stage 2
- measuring students' attainment at the end of Year 8 to demonstrate the progress made by students
- ensuring that, as part of the revision of schemes of work, unnecessary repetition of teaching the same subject knowledge is eliminated
- improving the sharing of good practice across the key stages by providing greater opportunity for peer observation of teaching.

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

Ian Richardson
Her Majesty's Inspector