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Mr L Nettley
Headteacher
Millais School
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Dear Mr Nettley

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 11 July 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 the deputy head, the science management team and Year 10 students, observation of three lessons, scrutiny of documents and scrutiny of pupils' work.

Features of good practice observed

- Students are making good progress during Key Stage 3 and reach high standards.
- In Key Stage 4 students study either double science or all three separate sciences. The number of students gaining five A* - C grades for double science is just above that achieved nationally although within that number over one fifth of students reached the highest grades. Students taking three sciences also make good progress and reach standards that are above average.
- Pupils make it clear that they very much appreciate the enthusiasm and hard work of their teachers and several said this was why they like science and intended to continue with it as a career.

- The refurbishing of laboratories and the installation of interactive whiteboards have created a very positive environment for learning science.
- There is a systematic and detailed approach to assessment that gives pupils detailed feedback on their performance in tests and examinations.
- There is a good emphasis in some lessons on scientific enquiry. This is well liked by students and promotes their engagement and interest.
- Some teachers are making good use of strategies to involve students in understanding their own learning styles and how they can use this to improve the progress they make.
- Information and communication technology is being used more than previously, and this is helping pupils to develop as independent learners.
- The curriculum provides good opportunities for students to develop their interests in science. The option to study three sciences at GCSE is open to all, not just to the more able.
- The good leadership of the department had created a strong team that works well together and provides students with good quality science education.
- Very good self evaluation strategies give a clear picture of the work of the department. All members of the team participate in this process and students' opinions also make an important contribution. Outcomes of the evaluation process are used very effectively to plan future developments.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- developing strategies for marking students work that give more feedback on what they need to do to improve
- extending the science curriculum beyond the classroom by improving science related extra-curricular activities.

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

Christine Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector