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Mr W Bancroft
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Dear Mr Bancroft

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 12 June 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, discussions with senior staff and heads of department, observation of two lessons, scrutiny of documents and scrutiny of students' work.

Features of good practice observed

- Students in Year 9, especially girls, make very good progress and achieve very well in science.
- Behaviour in the lessons observed was very good.
- Students demonstrate very good attitudes to learning which are fostered by teachers' astute class management.
- Teaching is lively and enthusiastic which helps to increase motivation.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and explain concepts very clearly.
- Lessons include a very good range of learning activities.
- Teaching makes marking criteria explicit and this enables students to understand clearly what they need to do to achieve specific grades.
- Some effective use of peer assessment was observed.
- Teachers' questioning techniques are effective.
- Good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance teaching and learning.
- Teachers use a range of effective techniques to improve understanding. For example, in one GCSE lesson the teacher demonstrated a technique for drawing line of best fit. There was good student involvement as a number then tried the technique using a laptop connected to a projector.

In an A level biology lesson very good use was made of a game to simulate natural selection.

- The modular Twenty First Century Science course has been implemented effectively, and is being used well to raise achievement.
- GCSE coursework allows students to pursue a study of a topic of particular interest to them.
- The school has a Year 9 science and technology club which has produced a 'green' car for a competition.
- The attachment of a higher level teaching assistant to science brings many benefits. This has allowed her to develop her subject knowledge and enables her to provide very effective support in science lessons.
- Teachers plan very well to meet the full range of students' individual needs. This was exemplified in one excellent lesson plan where the teacher had noted the particular needs of many individuals and clearly identified how these could be met. This was particularly impressive as the teacher had only recently started teaching the group, and she evidently understood individual needs exceptionally well.
- Leadership and management in science are good. There is a clear commitment to raising achievement.
- Assessment and performance data are analysed thoroughly.
- The highly effective Key Stage 4 tracking system is used well to monitor progress and identify areas for improvement.
- The science handbook is a useful document, clearly written and practical in its approach.
- Teamwork within the science department is strong.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- considering how the entitlement to triple science at Key Stage 4 for those achieving level 6 at Key Stage 3 might be met
- further refining sixth form target setting to ensure that targets are realistic and that students are better involved in the process of monitoring progress
- continuing to develop and implement strategies to raise boys' achievement.

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

Ruth James
Her Majesty's Inspector