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Dr J Greene
Headteacher
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Dear Dr Greene

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 06 November 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. 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: analysis of data, interviews with staff and learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, students' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Standards are above average and achievement is good.

- The proportion of students gaining at least two GCSE grades A*-C in science subjects in 2007 was well above the national average.
- In 2008 un-validated data show that over one quarter of all science GCSE examination results were graded A or A*.
- Overall students make good progress in science during their time at the school.
- School's data show students generally do better in science than in their other subjects.
- In the lessons observed students made good progress and achieved above average standards.
- Students' behaviour in science lessons is good.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning in science are good.

- Teachers are knowledgeable, committed, very hard working and enthusiastic.
- All the lessons observed were good.
- A good range of learning activities is included in lessons to engage interest, motivate students and develop understanding.
- There are some good opportunities for practical and experimental work which are particularly enjoyed.
- Teachers are supportive and encouraging. There are productive interactions in lessons which promote learning.
- There is much whole class teaching which is well planned and managed, and meets most needs, but some students could achieve even more.
- Students know their individual targets and the levels they are working at.
- Students interviewed were generally very positive about science which they enjoy.
- The marking of students' work is generally helpful with some including targets for improvement.
- Teaching assistants provide very effective support in lessons for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in science is good.

- The range of courses offered at Key Stage 4 meets the needs of the school's students. Courses include science, additional science, additional applied science and triple science (physics, chemistry and biology). This range is particularly commendable given the small size of the school.
- There are some opportunities for independent investigative work but there is scope for increasing this.
- Some appropriate cross curricular links are made.
- There are some appropriate enrichment activities in science, including activities which make effective use of the local environment.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good.

- Day-to-day operational management is very effective.
- Departmental leadership shows a clear vision of science for the future and an awareness of issues to be addressed.
- Leadership is dealing very well with the transition following the changes in all teaching and technician staff in summer 2008.
- Analyses of results, including module examination results, are effectively carried out.
- There is a clear focus on raising achievement.
- There is effective staff teamwork and sharing of teaching and learning ideas.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing opportunities for more independent investigative work
- developing more strategies for differentiation to ensure that tasks and activities are aligned more closely to students abilities to help raise achievement further.

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

Ruth James
Her Majesty's Inspector