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19 November 2008

Mr A Corish
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Corish

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 17-18 November 2008 to look at work in science.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on tracking 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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Students' achievements are good and standards in science are above recent national averages.

- Students come to the school from across central Hampshire with attainment at Key Stage 2 above national average.
- Key Stage 3 attainment in science shows an improving trend and has been above national averages for the past five years. In 2008 three quarters of the students achieved Level 6 or better and almost a third Level 7 or better in national tests.
- Students make good progress in their science studies at Key Stage 3 and no group by gender, ethnicity or ability makes less progress than any other.

- GCSE science examination results have been above national averages for some years. Attainment in science at GCSE improved again in 2008 and the vast majority of students achieved two GCSE A* to C grade passes in science. Separate science results were good although the proportion of A* and A grades declined slightly.
- Of particular note were the high proportion of A* to C grade passes in GCSE core and additional science by students of modest and lower ability.
- Progress from Key Stage 3 to 4 in science is good and no group by gender, ethnicity or ability makes less progress than any other.
- Students' behaviour is good and they show respect for the opinions of others. They cooperate well in the laboratories and work conscientiously.
- Written work is of a good standard. Practical work is carried out safely and investigations are of an appropriate standard.

Quality of teaching and learning in science

Teaching and learning are good.

- Of the six lessons observed, five were judged to be good and one satisfactory. This small sample, which included a joint lesson observation with the deputy head teacher, is in agreement with the judgements the school has made regarding the quality of teaching and learning in science.
- Science lessons are well planned and teachers use information communication technology (ICT) well to engage the students' interest. Teachers are well qualified specialists. Students, especially in Key Stage 4, appreciate their specialist knowledge and expertise.
- There is a positive working atmosphere in science lessons and the teachers are skilled at managing students' behaviour and the pace of learning.
- Whilst teachers use ICT to good effect, there are insufficient opportunities for students to use ICT such as data-loggers and remote sensors in science lessons.
- In addition the science team's self assessment accurately identifies the need to further develop differentiated practical investigations and assessment for learning activities.
- Assessment is good. Central records of students' test, module and assignment scores are systematically kept and used to monitor progress. Students are confident of their target grades and the progress they are making.
- Students' work is regularly marked. However, there is not always enough emphasis on following up marking to ensure that students have completed exercises or corrections.

Quality of the science curriculum

The science curriculum is good, has recently been broadened and effectively meets the needs of the range of students at the school.

- The new Key Stage 3 science curriculum has an appropriate focus on “how science works” and Year 7 students speak enthusiastically about the forensic science activities.
- Schemes of work are comprehensive and show good emphasis on investigations and developing students’ explanatory skills.
- The science team are currently developing a Year 9 curriculum where the top sets start separate science GCSEs and the remainder core science with the pathway to a vocational qualification delayed until the second half of the year.
- There is a wide and sensible choice of science programmes for Key Stage 4. Around half of the Year 10 and Year 11 students take three separate GCSE sciences. The remainder take GCSE core and additional science. However, since the last academic year a BTEC first certificate in science has also been offered. A recent student survey indicated that students find the BTEC programme both interesting and rewarding.
- Enrichment activities in science are well organised and a good variety of opportunities are on offer and taken up by students. Over the past year students at the school have won awards for an aromatherapy inhaler in Young Enterprise and £500 from a local science competition.

Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management are good.

- The science team is well led and morale is high. Science teachers work well together and have successfully planned and implemented the new Key Stage 3 curriculum and introduced a vocational qualification in Key Stage 4.
- Technical support for teaching is particularly well organised and is appreciated by teachers.
- Lesson observation is robust and has accurately identified the key strengths and areas for improvement.
- Teaching staff are well qualified and there is a good spread of subject expertise. Specialist equipment is old but functional, as are the laboratories.
- The tracking and monitoring of students’ progress is sound.
- The science department’s self evaluation is concise and accurately identifies key strengths and weaknesses. The evaluation of the 2007/08 examination results was particularly rigorous as was the evaluation of performance against the 2007/08 development plan targets.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- focussing on developing and extending the most able in Key Stage 4 to achieve A* and A grades
- developing more ICT data-logging and remote data capture for students
- further developing assessment, marking and differentiation in order to continue to raise standards.

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