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Mr R Williams
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Dear Mr Williams

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 30 September and 01 October 2008 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 10 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' progress at Key Stage 3 is outstanding, and in 2007, the last year of validated data, the school was placed in the top 2% of schools in England.
- In Key Stage 4 students continue to make good progress such that the GCSE results for science are significantly above the average for all subjects in the school, which in turn are significantly above the national average.
- In the sixth form students make good progress and achieve well compared with other schools.

- The standards seen in lessons and in a scrutiny of students' work shows standards to be above the expected level.
- Since the award of science specialist college status in 2005 standards and achievement have both improved.
- The school interrogates performance data closely to identify successes and areas for improvement. They are developing a more rigorous targeting and monitoring system in science to track standards and achievement.
- Pupils are given good opportunities to take responsibility to which they respond well. They have a positive approach to work and demonstrate good personal development in the way they collaborate and get on with their work.

Quality of teaching and learning of science

Teaching and learning are good.

- The large majority of lessons seen were good and some were outstanding.
- There is a good range of teaching styles and varied activities that are well matched to the learning needs of students. The resources that teachers deploy, including information communication technology, are of good quality.
- Much of the teaching is well contextualised and relevant to the lives of students. A clear priority is the incorporation and development of science skills. The extensive involvement in science skills and practical work is cited by students as one of the most enjoyable aspects of science work.
- Students affirm their high levels of confidence and trust in their science teachers and speak positively of how teachers are always willing to help them.
- Teachers plan well, having clear objectives for lessons that are shared with students. Lessons clearly build on students' previous knowledge and understanding and teachers use questioning very well to check on progress and to engage pupils.
- There are clear expectations of teachers that students should be active participants in lessons and not simply passive learners.
- There are very good relationships between teachers and students and students show good attitudes and apply themselves well.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum provided is good.

- The schemes of work for science meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. The science department is developing the Key Stage 3 scheme of work in a rational way which is maintaining the best of current practice.
- The curriculum model in science, in which students begin their GCSE work in February of Year 9, is an efficient and effective strategy for making the most of students' time in school.

- Much of the science work is well contextualised. Students speak positively about the relevance to their lives of the science they study.
- The work pupils do is well targeted on their needs. This is accomplished through appropriate grouping of students and the provision of a range of activities and teaching materials.
- There is a good range of courses at GCSE and A level that provides students with pathways well matched to their needs. Students speak highly of the guidance they receive on choices they make.
- The departmental improvement plan shows the intention to improve extra-curricular and enhancement activities to a broader range of students.

Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management of science are good.

- Joint observation of teaching by school staff and HMI showed close agreement on the judgments made. The school's 'spotlight' system for evaluating quality of teaching and learning is effective in its evaluation of science teaching.
- Changes in management have continued to build on a well led and managed department. An initial focus on behaviour set by the new senior leadership has been followed by a clear focus on improving teaching and learning. The impact of these changes has been positive.
- Specialist science college status has had a positive impact on standards and achievement in science and the school can show improvements in other aspects and subject areas, not least the close working of science with mathematics.
- Improvements in work scrutiny and observation of science lessons, along with the introduction of new progress review sheets are all contributing to improvement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving some aspects of assessment, for example, the consistency of marking and the use of formative written comment to help students improve
- implementing more rigorous target setting and monitoring procedures.

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