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Mr L Conley  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Conley

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 23-24 September 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 proportions of students gaining GCSE grades A\*-C in science subjects are significantly above national averages.
- In national tests at Key Stage 3 in 2007 close to 90% of the students attained the expected Level 5 and over half attained above the expected level.
- Overall students make good progress in science during their time at the school.
- Students' behaviour is very good.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning in science are good.

- Teachers are committed, hard working and enthusiastic.
- Relationships between students and teachers are good, and this encourages productive interactions in lessons which promote learning.
- Learning materials such as worksheets are well presented and effective.
- Some effective use of question and answer was observed.
- A variety of activities is used in lessons to engage interest, motivate and develop understanding.
- Teachers' expositions are particularly clear. Teachers explain concepts very well, and they make good use of visual materials to illustrate the points they are making. Key points are effectively reinforced.
- The lessons observed were all at least good, and in some cases outstanding.
- Good use is made of information and communications technology in lessons.
- Individual targets are set for science and progress is regularly reviewed against these.

### 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 most students. Courses include core science (over one or two years), additional science, and triple science (physics, chemistry and biology).
- There is a good range of enrichment activities in science, including events such as the 'Whizz Bang Show', which students particularly enjoy.
- In keeping with the school's specialist sports status there are effective and productive links with the PE department. For example, both departments contribute to the Year 7 'My Body' project.
- The science department makes a good contribution to 'healthy schools' work.

### Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good.

- Day-to-day operational management is very effective.
- The introduction of the new GCSE courses has been very well managed.
- There is a clear management focus on raising achievement.
- The head of department carries out thorough analyses of attainment and progress data and uses these to identify areas for development.
- A range of strategies has been implemented to raise achievement at Key Stage 3, with some success over the period 2005 to 2007.
- Departmental documentation is thorough and comprehensive.
- There is effective staff teamwork and sharing of teaching and learning ideas.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing more differentiation strategies, especially in mixed ability classes, to help raise achievement further

- encouraging more independent learning in lessons to ensure that students think about and apply their knowledge, for example in planning investigations
- further developing strategies to involve students more in assessing and taking responsibility for their own learning.

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