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Mr D Smith  
Headteacher  
The Winston Churchill School  
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Dear Mr Smith

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 2008 to look at work in science.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the science, the visit had a particular focus on 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 11 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are good at Key Stage 3 and satisfactory at Key Stage 4.

- Students enter the schools with attainment at Key Stage 2 slightly above the national average.
- Analyses show that progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 in science is satisfactory.
- Attainment overall at Key Stage 3 has been above the national average for the past six years. In 2008, attainment in science declined slightly but was above average at Level 5 and above and Level 7 and above.

- Girls and boys show similar attainment as do those students from black or minority ethnic heritage and those for whom English is a second language.
- Attainment at Key Stage 4 has been good for the past three years for the cohort of able students who take GCSE separate sciences. In 2008, all students taking biology and all but one in chemistry and physics obtained A\* - C grade passes. However, the proportion obtaining A\* or A pass grades was at the national average and students generally achieve better GCSE grades in English and mathematics than those they achieve in science.
- The GCSE core science and additional science results, taken for the first time in 2007-08, were low. A\*-C pass rates were 52% and 45% respectively. Progress from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 is satisfactory and most groups of students make similar progress. However, girls with attainment below Level 5 at Key Stage 3 and students on school action plus make less progress than their fellows.
- Work in class is generally of a satisfactory standard. The presentation of work is good and some extended writing by Key Stage 4 students is both creative and of a high standard.

#### Quality of teaching and learning in science

Teaching and learning are satisfactory.

- Lessons are generally well planned and resourced. Science teachers are confident in their subject knowledge and willingly give help to individual students in class.
- In the best lessons students know exactly what is expected of them and behave sensibly. However, there are inconsistencies of approach to behaviour management in the science team. In some lessons there is a background of chatting and not all students are engaged or interested in what is going on.
- The best lessons have short, well thought out starter activities to engage and interest the students. These are followed by longer, small group activities that challenge students and allow them to develop relevant skills and understanding. In a Year 7 lesson the students were introduced to the use of microscopes and were soon enthused and excited by discovering the detailed structure of feathers, fibres in paper and pond weed.
- Teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) with aplomb and are confident using PowerPoint and web links to enliven their lessons. There are, however, few opportunities for students to use ICT such as data loggers in lessons.
- Assessment is generally sound and students are effectively tracked and monitored. Marking is regular but does not always contain enough specific feedback on how students could improve.

#### Quality of the science curriculum

The science curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is balanced and broad enough to meet the needs of all students. A foundation group in Year 7 was instituted in 2007-08 to meet the needs of least able students. This is a sensible development and helps to prepare the students for aspects of adult life.
- National strategies have informed the Key Stage 3 curriculum and are beginning to impact on Key Stage 4. However, planning for individual assessments in 2007-08 was not well organised.
- The Key Stage 4 curriculum meets the needs of students including the most able and the school is actively considering widening access to the three separate sciences in Years 10 and 11. In addition the school is planning to introduce a vocational course in science to broaden the curriculum.
- Enrichment is good and an active science club is currently flourishing. Over 30 Key Stage 3 students attended an after school session in which they extracted DNA from their epidermal cheek cells. The astronomy club and other activities and trips are popular.

### Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- On a day to day basis the science team is well led. Practical work is well resourced and the technical support for lessons is good.
- Staffing for science is more stable this year after a period of turbulence.
- Some laboratories are old, drab and furnished in ways that do not allow the full range of science teaching and learning. Several have been refurbished but the remainder do not constitute good learning environments.
- Science teachers are not consistent in their expectations of students and behaviour management is not strong throughout the team.
- Planning for the new GCSE curriculum did not take enough account of the time and resources needed to complete individual assessments. This has, however, been addressed in 2008.
- The science self-evaluation is lengthy and descriptive and not evaluative enough. However, the development plan is sensible and addresses most of the identified weaknesses.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards in science, particularly at Key Stage 4
- managing students' behaviour in lessons
- creating more ICT opportunities for students in science lessons
- developing curriculum planning and annual team evaluation.

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