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Mr J Harris
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Harris

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit with Mary Massey HMI on 25-26 November 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 seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Standards overall are above the national average. Achievement is good.

- Standards in Key Stage 3 have been significantly above the national average from 2005 to 2007 i.e. the last set of validated performance data. These standards have not changed significantly in 2008.
- The achievement of students in Key Stage 3 during the three years 2005-2007 was significantly above schools in similar circumstances.
- Key Stage 4 has been subject to significant curriculum change. Standards and achievement vary but they are never less than satisfactory and some courses show good achievement of students.

- The school's analysis of performance is thorough and they have clearly identified areas of success and areas for development. They are already implementing changes to bring about improvement.
- Standards seen in lessons and the progress students make shows some variation but they are both good in the large majority of lessons seen.
- Students demonstrate good personal development in the way they willingly take on roles and responsibilities and maintain very good behaviour.

Quality of teaching and learning of science

Teaching and learning are good.

- The science faculty has a committed staff who work well together to make good provision for students.
- Students make it very clear that they think teaching is no less than good and often outstanding.
- Students feel very safe and well cared for in science, indeed they rate provision as outstanding in the large majority of cases.
- Teachers plan well and provide a good range of activities for students to engage with, often at a good pace. Overall the levels of application and engagement are high. Students clearly enjoy science lessons.
- Relationships between students and with teachers are both good and respectful. Very little off task activity was seen and no students attempted to disrupt the teaching.
- Teachers use questioning techniques well to elicit students' ideas, keep them engaged and to check on the progress students are making
- Arrangements for the assessment of students' attainment are systematic and made available to all teachers to promote evaluation of teaching.
- The quality of marking varies and teachers do not consistently give written comment on students' work to provide them with the information they need to improve.
- While there are well kept records of students' needs provided by the learning support staff, teachers' planning for those specific needs is not always evident and is inconsistent in quality.
- Teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) very effectively to display information and to stimulate students through audio-visual presentation, including the use of the Internet. Teachers are less successful at providing students with the opportunity to use ICT for themselves.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum provided is good.

- Since September 2006 the range of science courses offered by the school has increased and the curriculum continues to develop.
- The school has an increasingly sophisticated curriculum model to provide for the needs of all students. The range of courses includes both academic routes of three separate sciences, combined science

routes at core and additional level, and applied science for those students who learn well in an applied context.

- The school is well placed to develop applied science courses for post-16 students.
- The science faculty shows very good and developing enrichment of science courses. The applied science course has strong links with several local science-based businesses and services.
- Students on the applied science course are very positive about the opportunities and experiences the course provides. Other courses and year groups engage in enrichment activities and much of the science is well-contextualised and relevant to students' lives.
- Enrichment is provided by visiting experts to the school and visits outside the school designed to support studies and generate continuing interest.
- There are excellent links with local primary schools that involve a range of activities. These include opportunities for collaborative working and staff development.

Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management of science are good.

- There have been clear developments in building team working in the science department.
- The head of science has put in place effective management tools such as faculty policies and development planning that have brought increasing coherence to the efforts of staff.
- There is a good collaborative culture and staff feel well supported and enabled to contribute to raising standards in science. They feel their views are sought and heard.
- There is good reflective practice in the faculty with colleagues reviewing provision, identifying the successful activities and identifying areas for personal and departmental development.
- The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is systematic and is planned to increase in the frequency of lesson observation. As yet peer observation by teachers is limited.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- bringing about increased quality and consistency of feedback to students on how they can improve
- improving the use of information of students' individual needs in planning teaching and learning
- ensuring that cross-curricular links to other subjects and skills development are secured in planning new courses
- creating greater opportunities for students to use ICT in their science work.

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