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Mr Senior
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Dear Mr Senior

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science and citizenship

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during our visit on 10-11 February 2009 to look at work in science and citizenship.

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.

Science

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 ten lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be good with some outstanding features.

Achievement and standards

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

- In 2007, the last year of validated Key Stage 3 test results, the data showed that the average points score for science was significantly above the national average. This had been the case in each year since 2003 except for 2005. Results in 2008 were not as positive.

- Attainment at GCSE in science has been well above the national average in recent years. The results in science subjects overall in 2008 were significantly above the national average.
- The proportion of students achieving two more GCSEs in science in 2008 is significantly higher than the national average. Science is undoubtedly performing better at GCSE than other subjects.
- Overall for sciences at AS and A level GCE results are around the national average and have been so for several years.
- Observation of lessons, discussions with students and scrutiny of their work shows standards to be good and the progress they make is also good.
- Throughout the visit the students showed a positive attitude to work and they showed maturity and responsibility for their age. Their behaviour was good.

Quality of teaching and learning of science

Teaching and learning are outstanding.

- A large proportion of lessons observed were good or better and a large minority showed outstanding teaching.
- Teachers are enthusiastic for their subjects and their skills of teaching are very much appreciated by the students. The older the students are the more positive their views. In the sixth form all students described the teaching as outstanding.
- The quality of assessment and the help and guidance given by teachers were rated by students as mainly outstanding. As one student said of teachers, 'nothing is too much for them'.
- Teachers demonstrate good skills and work in such a way as to effectively engage students and promote their participation.
- Teachers plan a good range of activity that is designed effectively to meet the needs of all students.
- The quality of resources used in science is good. Teachers use information and communication technology effectively to display information and engage students. There are few examples of students using the electronic whiteboards interactively.
- There is a good focus on the development of science skills and how science works is being effectively embedded in the new schemes of work.
- The assessment of students' attainment is carried out consistently and their progress is tracked carefully. The assessment of students' work other than by testing is developing well. Teachers give students helpful written comments on their work to promote improvement.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum provided is good.

- The science department is travelling through a time of change with new or recently introduced courses in all key stages.

- Schemes of work for Key Stage 3 are being re-written to meet the requirement of the new National Curriculum. This work is being done through effective collaboration between staff.
- The new Year 9 scheme of work, when written, is intended to blend the work of Key Stage 3 with the GCSE courses and to avoid unnecessary repetition of work.
- The new schemes of work are embedding the development of how science works in a range of relevant topics and providing the opportunity for making more cross-curricular work and skill development possible.
- The school is planning well to continue the teaching of three separate sciences but completely within curriculum time rather than relying on after school classes.

Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management of science are outstanding.

- The department runs very well on a day-to-basis. This is made possible because of the very good efforts and collaboration of staff combined with the very strong and coherent management and leadership.
- Clear documentation, good communication and effective systems all contribute to the coherence of the department. Staff support each other very well and they are improving strategies to share their good practice. The move to a virtual learning environment is planned to support this.
- Monitoring, target setting and self evaluation are all of good quality and continue to develop. Planning for improvement is rational and well related to the issues identified through self-evaluation.
- The performance data are thoroughly analysed and allow the performance of individuals to be tracked. This concern for the progress made by individual students is a strength.
- The science staff have clear roles and responsibilities and work well together to make good provision for students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the attainment of students on post-16 science courses
- completing schemes of work for all key stages that promote the development of how science works, cross-curricular experiences and skills.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop science in the school.

Citizenship

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included interviews with senior leaders, the citizenship subject leader and teachers responsible for activities related to citizenship; scrutiny of relevant documentation and analysis of students' work; discussion with students; and observation of a

range of lessons in citizenship and other subjects and meetings of student councils and the debating society.

There are great strengths but also important weaknesses in provision: the overall effectiveness of citizenship was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall.

- In Key Stage 3 knowledge and understanding of the citizenship programme of study are generally weak.
- Standards attained by citizenship GCSE students in Key Stage 4 are good; in 2008 all students gained at least grade C and most gained higher grades. Those not doing the GCSE attain satisfactorily.
- The small number of students taking AS citizenship achieve well.
- Throughout the school students have many opportunities for participation and action in citizenship contexts. All students including those in the sixth form are expected to participate and many do so very effectively.
- Examples of very high standards were seen in debating a topical current issue. Students involved in the school parliament and related councils, year councils, committees and clubs demonstrated great responsibility and the skills and disposition to act on behalf of the communities they represent.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in lessons observed was good.

- Lessons were well planned and paced and used interesting resources. Relationships were excellent. Students enjoyed learning.
- Lessons observed in other subjects demonstrated useful links to citizenship on the themes of leadership, civil rights and action to combat global warming.
- An effective tutorial approach was used in AS citizenship.
- Time was well used in registration to discuss citizenship issues. These were taken seriously by students who expressed enjoyment of the sessions.
- Monitoring and your own self-evaluation suggest that teaching is consistently good; however the time slots available in registration limit the range and depth of work that can take place.

The curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory overall.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is fragmentary and lacking a core of learning in key areas. Some topics such as crime and the law are covered reasonably over the span of the form registration periods, but the key area of parliamentary democracy is weak. The planned

suspended timetable days will augment provision but are unlikely to be a substitute for a coherent curriculum with range and depth.

- The Key Stage 4 curriculum is stronger, particularly for those students studying the GCSE. The newly adopted 'skills for working life' course would need to be extended to accommodate statutory requirements if this were to be the main vehicle for citizenship.
- There are many valuable opportunities for participation in citizenship contexts and the school has an expectation that all students, particularly those in the sixth form, will be involved.
- There is a need to distinguish more clearly between citizenship and PSHEE to ensure that the requirements of both are met. A recent audit has raised awareness of links to citizenship across the curriculum but there is potential for other subjects to make a more tangible contribution.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of citizenship are good.

- There is a strong vision for citizenship in the school, manifested in the degree to which students are encouraged to participate in school life, not the least through the school parliament and associated councils and clubs, with local, national and international concerns.
- The subject leader has had strong support from the senior leadership team, including resources and training opportunities.
- The introduction of the GCSE and AS has strengthened the school's work in citizenship.
- The school has shown a willingness to try new approaches and evaluate their effectiveness. However, current curriculum provision in short registration periods is very difficult to lead and manage and unlikely to fulfil school aims, albeit the coordinator has worked hard to resource and monitor provision.

Subject issue: assessment

- An assessment scheme is in place, building on the three point scale in use before the introduction of assessment levels in citizenship.
- The use of assessment activities is valid but there is a need for greater continuity if assessment is to be effective.
- Assessment in examination courses is good, drawing on past examination papers and mark allocations.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to review the Key Stage 3 curriculum to provide clearer definition of citizenship and PSHEE and provide a core programme which displays the full National Curriculum requirements and allows for work in range and depth
- follow up the recent cross-curricular audit with a more detailed enquiry about departmental responses to the revised National Curriculum and

whether particular subjects can make a tangible contribution to the citizenship programme

- developing more assessment tasks, taking account of the full range of objectives of National Curriculum citizenship
- considering what further measures might be taken to support the subject leader in these developments.

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