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Mr L Rippon
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Dear Mr Rippon

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 12-13 March 2009 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 percentages of students achieving the top GCSE grades of A* or A in physics, chemistry and biology were high in 2008.
- Above average proportions of students gained at least two GCSE grades A*-C in science subjects in 2007 and 2008.
- School progress tracking data are indicative of improving achievement in science.
- GCE A level pass rates in physics, chemistry and biology were high in 2008.
- Value added data show that students completing GCE A level science courses in 2008 made very good progress.
- In the majority of the lessons observed students made good progress.
- Students' behaviour in the lessons observed was good.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning in science are good.

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge. They are committed, hard working and enthusiastic.
- The majority of the lessons observed were good.
- Relationships between students and teachers are good, and this fosters a productive learning environment.
- A range of activities is used in lessons to engage interest and motivate students.
- Many lessons include practical and experimental work which students particularly enjoy.
- Teachers' explanations are clear.
- Some effective use of question and answer was observed.
- There are some opportunities for collaborative work and group work which enable students to discuss their ideas about science.
- There is effective support from teaching assistants for students with specific needs.
- In a minority of lessons there is insufficient reinforcement of key points.
- Good use is made of information and communication technology to enhance learning.
- Individual targets are set for science and progress is regularly reviewed against these.
- Marking is generally helpful and often includes comments explaining how to improve the work.
- Students met during the inspection were positive about science lessons which they enjoy.

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 the separate science subjects of physics, chemistry and biology.
- At Key Stage 3 a new scheme of work has been introduced with greater emphasis on 'how science works'.
- The sixth form curriculum includes GCE AS and A levels in physics, chemistry and biology.
- Although there are some opportunities for students to plan their own independent investigations in science there is scope for increasing this.
- Enrichment activities in science include visits and participation in events such as the local science Olympics.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good.

- Day-to-day operational management is very effective.

- A very thorough analysis of data is carried out and used to identify areas for development and to plan improvements.
- Strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning and raise achievement are in place and are having an impact, as is shown in the improving science results.
- A highly effective progress tracking system is in place, and this is used to plan interventions.
- Leaders and managers are aware that some laboratories are in need of refurbishment. Although this will be addressed in the future through the new building plans, the existing laboratories will continue to be used for some years.
- Self-evaluation is effective at both senior management and department and subject level. There is a sound understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in science and a determination to improve.
- Departmental documentation is thorough and comprehensive.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the quality of existing laboratories and equipment for the period prior to the new laboratories becoming available
- continuing to develop and implement strategies to raise achievement even further at Key Stage 4
- encouraging more independent learning to ensure that students think about and apply their knowledge, for example in planning investigations.

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