

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



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Miss S Roberts  
Headteacher  
Prendergast School  
Adelaide Avenue  
Lewisham  
London  
SE4 1LE

Dear Miss Roberts

Ofsted survey inspection programme – science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 28-29 January 2009 to look at work in science.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on tracking the impact of recent initiatives and investigating 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 nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Students' achievements are good and standards in science are above recent national averages.

- Over the past few years science results at the end of Key Stage 3 have been above national averages.
- At Key Stage 4 GCSE science results over the past two years have been above national average in both core and additional science A\*-C attainment.
- Progress, as measured by CVA scores has been good. Most progress is made by the top 50% of the year cohorts.

- Key Stage 4 attainment in science is not as strong when compared with other subjects in the school such as English and French.
- Attainment in A level sciences is outstanding. In 2008 all three science A level subjects had 100% pass rates and between 40 and 60% of the grades in biology and chemistry were at A or B.
- Value added analyses show that students' progress in advanced level sciences is at or above that predicted by their prior attainment.
- The girls behave well in this school and they bring high levels of commitment and cooperation to their science lessons. They listen attentively and show respect and empathy for the views of others.
- The science team sets high standards and students' work is usually of a very good standard. High attaining students demonstrate very good understanding and their written work is excellent.
- There is good development of relevant scientific vocabulary and students explain themselves well orally.

### Quality of teaching and learning in science

Teaching and learning in science are good.

- Teachers set high standards and have high expectations of their students. In the best lessons the girls are quite clear what is expected of them and respond accordingly.
- In lessons judged to be satisfactory, the level of engagement of students would have been raised by greater focus on planning short and more highly differentiated activities. This was more noticeable in sets of lower ability.
- Science teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) well to introduce lessons and to help students focus on specific tasks.
- Small group activities, competitive tasks and practical work are all well planned and imaginatively developed.
- Investigative and practical activities are well integrated into work topics.
- Teachers are well qualified specialists.
- Assessment and monitoring of students' progress is a key strength of the science team. Testing and practical assessments are regularly carried out and assessment data are centrally recorded. Progress is accurately tracked.
- Marking is regular but diagnostic marking is still in the process of development. Some files from middle and lower ability students in Key Stage 4 were markedly less organised than others.
- Students, especially those at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, are confident about their predicted grades and feel that assessment is fair.
- Follow up support for students making less progress is good and students reported that teachers are helpful and supportive.

## Quality of the science curriculum

The science curriculum is good.

- The science curriculum at both Key Stage 3 and 4 effectively meet the needs of the students.
- Schemes of work have been reviewed and adapted to meet recent developments. In Year 7 there is much more emphasis on “how science works” and both staff and students welcome this change in emphasis.
- Both core and additional science are offered at GCSE. Separate sciences are in the second year of teaching and will complete for the first cohort in summer 2009.
- In the sixth form, A and AS levels in biology, chemistry and physics are taught. In collaboration with local schools a number of boys attend courses in the sixth form to take advanced subjects such as physics.
- Enrichment is satisfactory. There is a science club, a good range of visits and speakers and a medical club run by the students. In addition, biology students in the sixth form go on a week of fieldwork to the Isle of Wight each summer.

## Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management of science are good.

- The science team is well led and day to day running of the department is smooth. The team meets regularly; they share good practice and are supportive of one another.
- A well qualified team of technicians provides very good support to the teaching and learning of science. They are well organised and understand thoroughly the schemes of work and how to service the investigations and practical activities. Health and safety is a high priority and is successfully promoted.
- Resources are good in the main. Some equipment is old but it is fit for purpose.
- Accommodation is cramped in some small laboratories. Some science lessons are taught in classrooms each week. However the science team collaborate well to lessen the impact of this on students' learning. In terms of accommodation, the science team is under-resourced.
- Continuing professional development (CPD) for the science team is well organised. The teachers spoke very positively about the number of relevant activities and courses they had recently completed. Support for CPD from senior management is good and the school is keen to continue to invest in its staff.
- There is a productive dialogue between the science team and management on how to organise the science curriculum for Year 9 now that Key Stage 3 national tests have been discontinued.
- Science teachers get effective support from managers in order for them to continue to develop their skills and to make sure that they are in tune with school strategic priorities.

- The science development plan has been recently extensively reviewed and developed. However, it does not focus enough on outcomes for students and how identified areas for development will be addressed.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing diagnostic assessment across the department
- planning more differentiated activities to engage the interest of lower attaining students
- ensuring that all science lessons are taught in laboratories
- continuing to refine the science development plan to make it more outcome focused.

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