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Mrs J Bradley
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Bradley

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 18 March 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 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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

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

- Attainment at Key Stage 1 was broadly at national averages in 2007/08. However, pupils come to the school with low literacy and oracy development and take some time to catch up.
- Attainment in science at Key Stage 2 is very good. In 2007/08 around 80% of pupils attained Level 5 or better and over 80% of the pupils made three or more levels of progress.

- Overall, the progress pupils make in their science lessons is very good. Performance data show that the school is amongst the top 100 in the country.
- Standards of work in class are high. Pupils are confident to ask questions and are encouraged to think things through.
- Written work is good and shows relevant coverage of aspects of science including how science works.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. Some pupils have less well-defined boundaries than others but their behaviour is well managed by the teachers and teaching assistants. The ethos in the school is warm and positive and the children treat each other with respect.

Quality of teaching and learning in science

Teaching and learning are outstanding.

- Teachers are confident and plan a very good balance of practical investigations and theory work. Investigations are interesting; they fully engage the pupils' imaginations and challenge them to make predictions and to articulate their developing explanations.
- It is interesting to note that the engagement of the pupils with their science work brings out the best in them and their behaviour is good.
- However in some lessons the starter activity lasted too long and the rest of the lesson was a little rushed.
- Teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) well to introduce lessons and to show relevant and interesting images to the pupils. Good use is made of teaching assistants to help pupils make progress in science.
- Assessment is good. Teachers are adept at informally checking progress in lessons and recording progress in a wide variety of ways. The "could, should and must" system works effectively and tracking documents are up to date and predict levels of attainment well.
- Marking is regular and in the best instances contains helpful comments and confirmation of levels attained.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the science curriculum is outstanding.

- The science curriculum is very well organised and constructed and meets the needs of the pupils at the school. There is full coverage of the national curriculum topics and a good balance of investigative work.
- Science topics have been thoughtfully developed, using the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) frameworks as a starting point, to fit in with the cross-curricular themes for each half term. This puts science and other subjects into a larger context for the pupils. For example, in a theme of poetry within literacy, Year 6 pupils studied volcanoes and not only learned the science behind eruptions but described volcanoes in terms of personification. At the same time art, drama and design and technology were also pursuing descriptions of volcanic activity.

- Enrichment in science is strong. Pupils have enjoyed assemblies focusing on conservation and recycling along with visits from amusing and inspiring companies such as Mad Science. At a local professional football club pupils had fun on rowing machines and learned a lot about fitness and health. In addition there are a good number of interesting visits with a science focus and an active Eco-team at the school.

Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management in science are outstanding.

- Senior managers and the science coordinator give high priority to science and appropriate support to teachers to maintain this.
- The science coordinator is enthusiastic, well organised and is a positive model to the other teachers.
- The school is in an area of high social deprivation and the science curriculum has been well thought through. It meets the needs of the pupils and is contextualised to engage their interest.
- Specialist resources for science are good. There is no shortage of equipment for investigations and resources are well organised in topic boxes.
- Continuing professional development in science has been in-house and has recently focused on successful investigative work. The science coordinator has received relevant and appropriate training.
- Support for assessment in science from senior managers has been successful in building the confidence of teachers to assess science investigations and this is still developing.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing IT resources for pupils to use in science lessons
- following up some inconsistencies in marking.

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