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10 July 2009

Mr S Hume
The Headteacher
Glenthorne High School
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Dear Mr Hume

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 26 June 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: discussions with you, the head of department and students, observation of three part lessons, scrutiny of documents and scrutiny of students' work.

Features of good practice observed

- The standards attained by students in science by the end of Year 11 are above the national average and students' progress is outstanding.
- The very positive climate for learning across the whole school is reflected in the way students work in science. The behaviour of students in the lessons observed was excellent.
- The science department have high expectations of students' achievement and personal development. This is evident in the challenging targets that are set.
- A strong feature of the school is its commitment to improving teaching and learning through programmes of coaching and mentoring. A number of staff in the science department have either been trained as mentors or have been mentored. This has led to the effective sharing and development of good and outstanding teaching and learning practice in the department.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and know examination requirements very well. Lessons are well planned and follow a common four part lesson structure.

- Students are assessed regularly using a combination of test and teacher assessments. This information is stored in a central database so that the progress of students towards their targets can be tracked. Good plans are in place to further improve this system. Those students who are underachieving are provided with effective support.
- Students are aware of their targets and how well they are doing. Effective marking and verbal feedback from teachers ensures that they are aware of what they need to do to improve.
- Students are well prepared for examinations. Students' knowledge and understanding of coursework assessment criteria are effectively developed through the use of peer- and self-assessment activities.
- The science curriculum is regularly reviewed in order that it best meets the needs of students. A new Key Stage 4 vocational science course is to be introduced in 2010.
- Students following the double award science course in Years 10 and 11 only have one science teacher. This ensures there is continuity of learning across all aspects of science. This contributes positively to the progress they make.
- The quality of provision and students' outcomes in science are monitored through lesson observations, scrutiny of teachers' planning and students' work and through analysis of students' progress information. This ensures the acting head of science has an accurate view of the strengths and weakness of the department. Good plans are in place to address areas in need of improvement.
- The science department is extremely well organised and managed. Communication in the department is strong and teachers work together well to improve outcomes for students.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- improving the progress made by the most able students in Years 7 to 11 from good to outstanding by providing them with a greater level of challenge
- improving the progress made by students on A level science courses.

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

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Peter Sanderson
Her Majesty's Inspector