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Mrs L Farmer
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Farmer

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 2 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, discussions with senior staff, observation of lessons, scrutiny of documents and scrutiny of pupils' work.

Features of good practice observed

- There is a clear and purposeful vision for the science department that aims to promote science as 'the best performing core subject' through focusing on standards and strong team work
- Standards in science have improved considerably in the past two years and students are now making good progress throughout Key Stage 3 and 4. In 2008 achievement was especially good in Key Stage 3 where results improved significantly.
- The new GCSE courses are improving standards and achievement as the breadth of provision is more appropriate to students' needs.
- Students enjoy the good teaching and appreciate the enthusiasm and good subject knowledge of their teachers.
- Teachers make the best use of the laboratory accommodation, some of which is quite old, by using displays of work and other posters to create a positive environment for learning science.

- Assessment for learning is a strong focus and good progress is being made by staff in setting targets for students' attainment to guide improvement. Students are aware of this process and know how teachers measure their progress. Some students are not clear about how to improve their work when they have met or exceeded their targets. In particular more able students are aware that the assessment system does not acknowledge their achievement when they reach their A* targets as these cannot be exceeded.
- The curriculum is broad and diverse with a good range of courses in Key Stage 4. Triple science is particularly strong and students enjoy studying the individual sciences, especially the practical aspects.
- 'Leaders in science' is a successful initiative that allows older students to work with primary pupils. This has improved enthusiasm for science in both groups of students.
- The department is well led and managed. There is a strong cohesive team ethos with all staff working towards improving the quality of science. This is supported by training and development activities that are appropriate both to the needs of the teachers and the aims of the department.
- The number of students taking post-16 science courses has grown recently as standards have improved and more students value studying science.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- continuing to develop and promote post-16 science courses that will encourage more students to study science beyond GCSE
- making sure that targets are sufficiently challenging for more able students.

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

Christine Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector