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Mr I Jungius
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Jungius

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff when I visited the school on 3-4 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. 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 parts of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Overall standards are well above the national average and achievement is good.

- Achievement has improved steadily over the past two years as the science teaching has focused more closely on tracking achievement and raising attainment.
- Results in 2008 were above national levels both at GCSE and Key Stage 3 and above the targets set by the department. Three quarters of pupils gained GCSE A* - C with almost a quarter gaining the highest A/A* grades.
- Information provided by the school shows that this improvement is set to continue in 2009.
- Students show very good attitudes to learning overall. They are keen and enthusiastic scientists who enjoy lessons that are practically based with plenty of opportunities for them to develop their skills through investigating and finding out.

- Students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. They give very positive views of the assessment systems in place and how it helps their learning.

Quality of teaching and learning of science

The overall quality of teaching and learning in science is good.

- All lessons observed were at least good with some outstanding elements.
- Lessons are well planned and are supported by a detailed scheme of work covering skill as well as knowledge development.
- Students experience a wide range of learning activities and they value the opportunity to study relevant science and to discuss science issues. They have a mature and sensible approach to this type of science teaching.
- Assessment arrangements are secure and systematic, producing performance data that are accessible to all teachers and which are interrogated thoroughly to check on progress.
- Students have very positive views of the quality of teaching they receive in science. They feel that science is a good department where lessons are 'not too stuffy and you can ask questions.'
- The quality and quantity of marking varies across the department with the best giving detailed and in depth feedback involving students in reflecting on their standards through teachers' written formative comment. In other cases books are rarely marked where teachers rely on more formal assessments to give feedback to students.
- Older students appreciate the strategy that allows them to use their work books to make their own notes as this encourages them as independent learners.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- There is a good range of courses in Year 10 and 11 that meets the needs of all students. Students speak positively of the help and guidance they receive in choosing courses and of the teaching they receive from their specialist teachers. The number of students taking all three separate sciences is increasing. These successful courses are now all being taught in scheduled time rather than being added on outside of curriculum time.
- Assessment strategies are being thoroughly embedded into the curriculum and teaching strategies. This is successful in keeping students focused on the level of their work as well as providing data for close tracking of their performance.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum overall is well planned to include learning and skills objectives alongside personal learning and thinking skills. The latter are not always clearly defined in individual lesson plans.
- Students said they would like more 'outside science'. There is little extra curricular enrichment taking place in science although plans are in place to reintroduce activities such as CREST awards.

Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management in science are good.

- Science is well managed in the context of a school where accountability is clear and there is strong senior leadership support. This has helped the department through some difficult staffing issues and led to the establishment of the current strong team.
- The work of the department is thoroughly evaluated and reviewed using thorough data analysis. This provides a strong basis for further development.
- The good quality tracking and assessment systems underpin the efforts of teachers to promote learning and raise attainment.
- There is good collaboration between teachers in developing the curriculum, producing schemes of work and generating good quality learning materials. Students appreciate the good displays, especially where their work is included.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring greater consistency in marking of students' work to give them feedback on their successes and what they need to do to improve
- strengthening the provision for science outside of curriculum time.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop science and music 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

Christine Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector