

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



26 June 2009

Mr R Whittaker
Allerton Grange School
Talbot Avenue
Leeds
West Yorkshire
LS17 6SF

Dear Mr Whittaker

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 18-19 June 2009 to look at work in science.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of science, the visit had a particular focus on transition within and between phases, the range of learning experiences provided; the status and use of scientific enquiry and how science works.

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 you and the science subject leader, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Standards overall are below the national average but achievement is satisfactory.

- The performance data from 2008 show that the progress made by students from Key Stage 3 to 4 in science is around average.
- The proportion of students being awarded at least two grade A*-C GCSE passes in science subjects is significantly below the national average.
- However, when compared with other subjects in the school the science subjects are seen to show higher than average performance.
- Assessment data from this academic year indicate that standards in science are rising and are on track to be at the national average.

- Standards in the sixth form are around the national average with physics being the highest performing science subject at A level in 2008.
- Observations of lessons and scrutiny of students' work also show standards are higher than the examination successes from last year would suggest. This is particularly true of the higher ability groups.
- Where progress is less than average it is associated with slower paced lessons, lower levels of application and off task behaviour.
- Weaker teaching is focused in getting through the lesson content rather than on the effectiveness of learning and the promotion of engagement and enjoyment.

Quality of teaching and learning of science

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall.

- The quality of teaching and learning varies widely with unsatisfactory outcomes in one lesson contrasting with some outstanding teaching in others. Students respond to this variation by variations in their behaviour and levels of application.
- Where teachers are focused on learning, the lessons are more successful, as students understand what they are doing and why and show consequential higher levels of application.
- In the best lessons it is clear that teachers regard students as the workers who need to be active participants. They expect students to take on responsibilities such as self- and peer-assessment. They do not expect students to absorb knowledge passively.
- There is some very good use of information and communication technology (ICT) by teachers and by students. However, this is not consistent across the department.
- Marking is also inconsistently carried out. There is some very good practice in the department and the departmental policy is coherent. When it is implemented students are clear about their targets, standards and what they need to do to improve.
- In interview students in all key stages described the variation in standards of teaching and of assessment. They did describe how many of the science teachers are very willing to help them outside lesson time.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum provided is satisfactory.

- The science department is going through a period of significant curriculum reform involving all key stages, particularly 3 and 4.
- The school and department have curriculum reform as a key area of development. This is to ensure the engagement and enjoyment of students on courses that meet their needs.
- The curriculum is increasingly broad, for example, by providing a vocational route in Key Stage 4 by introducing BTEC science.
- The leadership is seeking to ensure a suitable range of pathways 14 to 19 by considering providing vocational courses in science post-16.

- Students are very positive about the additional curriculum provided by teachers in revision sessions outside lesson times. They are grateful for the efforts teachers make for students' benefit.
- Currently there are limited extra-curricular science activities. However, there are some good examples of curriculum enhancement through visits outside school and visitors to the school.

Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management of science are satisfactory.

- You have a clear vision for improvements in the science department that fit in with your overall vision for the school.
- The focus of improvements in teaching and learning, the curriculum and quality assurance are shared by the leadership in science.
- The self-assessment carried out by the department shows that data are well analysed and points for improvement clearly identified.
- During this time of significant change the changes in planning and practice have yet to impact fully on standards and achievement.
- The quality assurance procedures implemented so far have not produced consistently good teaching, learning and assessment.
- The leadership and management of science are greatly valued by members of the department. They feel well supported in their efforts to teach effectively and to raise standards.
- As yet teachers have had few opportunities to share good practice through peer observations of lessons. There is exceptional practice in the department from which other teachers could benefit.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring teachers understand the need for students to be active rather than passive learners
- encouraging teachers to exercise greater flexibility in their planning to make the scheme of work content as relevant as possible to students, with a clear focus on their learning
- embracing methods of continual assessment, such as Assessing Pupil Progress (APP) that allow a regular insight into the progress made by students.

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

Ian Richardson
Her Majesty's Inspector