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07 July 2009

Mrs F Ashton
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Ashton

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 24-25 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: analysis of data, interviews with staff and learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, students' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Overall standards are above average and achievement is good.

- In 2008 GCSE physics, chemistry and biology all had 100% A*-C pass rates. In biology and chemistry a high proportion of students achieved an A* or A grade.
- The proportion of students gaining at least two GCSE grades A*-C in science subjects in 2008 was slightly above national average. This represents satisfactory progress for this cohort of students who had slightly above average attainment on arrival at secondary school.
- School assessment data and the results of GCSE science module examinations indicate that current students in Year 10 and Year 11 are on track to achieve better results than in 2008. This shows that current students are making good progress.
- Students' personal development is good. Some effective collaborative work was seen in lessons. The majority of students behave well and demonstrate good attitudes to learning.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning in science are good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge. They are lively and enthusiastic, and they convey their enthusiasm for their subjects to their students. This helps to motivate students who might otherwise have been reluctant to consider studying triple science (physics, chemistry and biology) at GCSE.
- Lesson plans follow a common format which includes differentiated learning objectives.
- Most lessons include a range of activities which engage students' interest, and promote learning. However in a minority of lessons, students are not sufficiently actively engaged in learning because the tasks are mundane, requiring little thought.
- In some lessons work is effectively differentiated to meet the needs of students of different abilities. However, this is not always the case.
- Information and communication technology is used effectively in many lessons.
- Some good use is made of practical and experimental work.
- Teachers make some effective use of question and answer, especially where teachers follow up their initial question with more probing ones to encourage students to think more deeply about their answers.
- Some use of self-assessment was observed.
- Teachers' explanations are clear.
- Relationships between teachers and students are good, and students spoken to said this was a significant factor in their enjoyment of science.
- Teaching assistants offer effective support to individuals and groups in lessons.
- Students know the target levels or grades they are aiming for and how well they are progressing towards these.
- Students' books are mostly well organised and presented. The marking of students' work is of variable quality. In some cases it includes useful comments to help students improve their work, but this is not consistent.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in science is good.

- There is a range of courses at Key Stage 4 that meets the needs of most, but not all, students. Courses include GCSEs in physics, chemistry and biology as well as science and additional science. The school is planning to introduce a new vocational course in September 2009 to meet a wider range of needs.
- There are some opportunities for independent investigative work.
- There are some good enrichment activities in science, including relevant trips and visitors to school.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good.

- The leadership of the science department is highly effective.

- Leadership and management of the triple science courses are also strong.
- Day-to-day operational management is effective, and staffing difficulties in science have been managed appropriately.
- There is a clear management focus on raising achievement. Students' progress is tracked effectively. Assessment data are used to identify and follow up underachievers.
- The location of most of the science laboratories on the second floor means that they are inaccessible to students with mobility difficulties. Facilities in the accessible first floor laboratory are more limited. The new school buildings, which are currently being constructed, will resolve this problem.
- The 'gifted and talented team' project initiated and led by a science teacher provides a valuable example of an intervention to raise achievement, as well as a useful piece of research.
- The impact of the school's science specialism on other subjects and aspects of the school's work is limited given the strengths that now exist in the department.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising the profile of science in the school by sharing the good practice that now exists in the science department more widely
- developing opportunities for more independent investigative work
- further improving the quality of teaching and learning, especially for students of lower ability, to ensure that they are actively engaged in learning at all times.

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

Ruth James
Her Majesty's Inspector