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Mr G Longman
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Longman

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 30 September and 1 October 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 seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is satisfactory.

- Students enter the school with standards well above the national average. By the end of Year 11, standards in science are extremely high.
- The analysis of how well science subjects performed in 2008 and 2009, against other subjects in the school, shows that they were significantly below the school's average.
- Value-added analysis of examination results for 2008 and 2009 indicates that, despite the high standards attained, a greater number of students could have achieved A* to A and A* to C grades in science subjects than was the case.

- The progress made by students between Years 7 and 11 is satisfactory. There is no significant difference in the progress made by different groups of students.
- Students attain very high standards in A-level science subjects. A greater percentage of students attain the high A and B grades than is seen nationally.
- Value-added analysis of students' progress in the sixth form over the past three years indicates that it is satisfactory.
- The school's specialism in science has done much to raise the profile of science in the school and students' enjoyment of the subject.
- The behaviour of students in science lessons is excellent.

Quality of teaching of science

The quality of teaching of science is satisfactory.

- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and most use this well to plan lessons around clear learning outcomes for students.
- In the best lessons, new scientific ideas and concepts are delivered through contexts that are relevant and interesting to students.
- Some teachers talk for too long and provide students with too much information rather than involving them actively in their learning.
- All the lessons observed were characterised by very good relationships between staff and students.
- Students, particularly those in the sixth form, are appreciative of the help and support they receive from teachers.
- Information, communication technology is used well by staff and students to enhance learning.
- There is inconsistency in the quality and frequency of marking across science subjects. Students are not always given regular and effective advice about how to improve their work. As a result, although students are aware of their targets and how well they are doing, they are less clear about what they must do to improve.
- Students are provided with few opportunities to assess their own work, reflect on their progress and set targets for the future.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The curriculum for science is good.

- The school's move to a two-year Key Stage 3 has two positive benefits for students. Firstly, it results in a more clearly focused key stage that avoids repetition of experiences and learning. Secondly, it enables all students to study the three separate sciences to GCSE level during Years 9 to 11. This provides them with a rich experience of science.
- The introduction of triple science for all has had a positive impact on the number of students choosing to take A-level sciences in the sixth form.
- Schemes of work are thorough. They identify opportunities for extension activities, and experiences for gifted and talented students. However, the development of scientific enquiry skills is not coherently mapped across the three separate sciences.
- The annual science week and other trips and visitors to school enhance students' enjoyment of science and their appreciation of the impact science has on their lives.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

Leadership and management of science are satisfactory.

- Specialist science college work is led and managed well. This initiative has led to significant improvements in the quality of science accommodation and resources, as well as helping to establish successful links with the local community, business and industry.
- The science department is jointly led by curriculum area managers (CAMs) for biology, chemistry, physics and Key Stage 3. This arrangement has led to some incoherence and inconsistency in procedures and practice across the separate science subjects.
- The high expectation of senior leaders and CAMs is evident in the challenging targets that are set for students.
- All science subjects track the progress of students towards their targets. However, each subject has developed its own tracking system. There is variation in the quality and effectiveness of these tracking systems and information is not shared across the subjects.
- CAMs are not monitoring the marking of students' work with sufficient frequency or rigour.
- CAMs are aware of the strengths and weaknesses in their subject. Sensible plans are in place to address areas of weakness.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- reviewing the current leadership and management arrangements in science to improve the coherence and consistency of procedures and practice across the faculty

- developing a single central tracking system so that assessment information can be used to identify student underperformance across all three subjects
- improving the frequency and rigour with which marking is monitored.

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/local Learning and Skills Council and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Peter Sanderson
Her Majesty's Inspector