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Mr I Kenworthy  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Kenworthy

Ofsted survey inspection programme – science

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 13 and 14 October 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 range of science courses offered in Key Stage 4 to meet the needs of all students; the range of science courses offered post-16 to meet the needs of all students.

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 the school leadership team, staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is outstanding.

- Students enter the school with attainment that is below the national average. They make outstanding progress such that, by the end of Key Stage 4, they are showing attainment that is well above the national average.

- The outcomes for students at Key Stage 4 have been significantly above those for similar schools over the three years up to and including 2008. Students from all groups are making similar excellent progress.
- Analysis of the performance of all the outcomes at GCSE shows science subjects to be performing significantly above the average for the school.
- The school's own analysis of performance data in 2009 shows that the progress of students has again been significantly above the national average for Key Stage 4. The progress made overall by students in the sixth form is good, but it is not as strong as that made lower down the school.
- Students are keen to answer questions and show confidence in tackling the work. Their behaviour is outstanding and they show good relationships with each other and with teachers.
- They show good personal development as they work well individually and in a range of groupings. They show responsibility and consideration for others and for the environment.

#### Quality of teaching of science

The quality of teaching in science is outstanding.

- A high proportion of lessons seen were outstanding and no teaching was inadequate. In discussion, students describe teaching as being of a very high standard.
- Teachers deploy a wide range of techniques and plan lessons that are highly engaging and most often relevant to the lives of students.
- Lessons are well resourced and information and communication technology (ICT) is used well to explain, describe and exemplify work in science contexts.
- Teachers monitor the progress made by students well and this is having a positive effect on the standards attained.
- Assessment is carried out systematically and effectively. Students are clear about their targets and very positive about the assessment by teachers.
- Marking is of good quality overall with much helpful written comment although there is some variation in the quality and quantity of comment.
- Much good quality support is provided by learning assistants and the higher level teaching assistant participates fully in planning, assessment activities and the development of the virtual learning environment.

## Quality of the science curriculum

The curriculum for science is outstanding.

- The curriculum is rich and balanced with a good range of courses to meet the needs of the large majority of students. The development continues as they consider the need for more vocational courses for the 14 to 19 age range.
- The curriculum meets National Curriculum requirements but is enriched to ensure that science is well contextualised and relevant to students' lives.
- There are a range of academic and vocational courses with the opportunities for express routes for students in Key Stage 3 for whom it is appropriate. There are clear arrangements for individuals to move between routes as judged necessary.
- Students expect to be active learners and do not want to be passive. In interview, they describe very few situations in science where they are expected, for example, simply to copy.
- The school makes good connections with other organisations and providers to plan rich educational experiences for students. For example, there are significant and extensive links with providers in other parts of the world such as the Far East and South East Asia.
- Many students experience science events in locations overseas and their experiences and the materials they produce enhance the work of students in school.
- A world view of scientific development is promoted strongly in the school.

## Effectiveness of leadership and management of science

Leadership and management of science are outstanding.

- Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. They demonstrate high levels of confidence in the leadership and management of the department.
- The head of department sets an excellent example. Departmental development is managed well and much of it is brought about by the effective collaboration of members of the department.
- Management is systematic and robust with such features as the evaluation of teaching and monitoring of performance being secure and understood well.
- Systems for target setting are clear and reviews of performance are frequent. Documentation sets out requirements in science clearly.

## Areas for improvement

- There are no areas for improvement that the school has not recognised and planned strategically to address.

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

Ian Richardson  
Her Majesty's Inspector