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19 March 2010

Mrs B Stevens
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Dear Mrs Stevens

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 20 and 21 October 2009, to look at work in science.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on evaluating the impact of recent initiatives and to investigate the need for future developments.

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 learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be good.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is good.

- The GCSE results for five A* to C in science were above average in 2008 and have continued to improve in 2009. Information on students' performance indicates that this rising trend in results is continuing as the new GCSE courses become firmly embedded into the science curriculum.
- Analysis of performance data for Key Stage 3 indicates that younger students are also reaching good standards.

- The quality of students' learning and progress is good. They make good progress from their starting points on entry to the school.
- Students are keen to learn and most work hard in lessons, especially, where the subject material is engaging and interesting.
- Students behave well in lessons. They enjoy discussions, are keen to voice their opinions in a mature and sensible way and work together well in practical sessions.

Quality of teaching of science

The quality of teaching in science is good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and use this well to make science lessons relevant and interesting to the students.
- In the best lessons, teachers understand the need for students to be active participants. Teachers have high expectations of students' behaviour and involvement in the lessons.
- Where students' independent learning and team-working skills are less well developed, teachers work hard to encourage students to work together and think about their individual contributions to the group.
- Students particularly enjoy science practical work, especially, where they are given creative opportunities to explore their own ideas.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used appropriately by both teachers and students to support teaching and learning.
- Marking and assessment practices are inconsistent within the department. Too much marking gives only limited diagnostic feedback and students, especially younger ones, are unclear about the standards they are reaching in science and what they could do to improve.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The science department is currently working on revising the Key Stage 3 curriculum with an emphasis on 'how science works'. The department has not, as yet, developed a common approach to scientific enquiry that would give students a clear framework when working on investigations.
- New GCSE courses have been introduced successfully. This has widened the options available to students that are more relevant and interesting. For example, students are really enjoying the coursework only BTEC science course as they find the subject material much more applicable to their everyday interests.

- A good range of extra-curricular activities support the science curriculum. Science clubs and extra revision sessions are well-attended as are the science lectures open to parents as well as students.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

Leadership and management of science are good.

- The school is clearly determined to maintain the good standards in science and the senior leadership team provides a positive environment for innovation and improvement in this department.
- Monitoring systems give a good view of the quality and standards of science education. This information is used as a springboard for further developments in teaching and learning.
- Thorough monitoring of the performance of each student gives a clear view of individual achievement and is used effectively to identify those who are not achieving the best they can.
- Teachers receive training that is appropriate to their needs from a variety of internal and external providers. In particular, the in-school 'research and development' meetings have set up a series of cross subject collaborative groups that are a good forum for developing and embedding improvements to teaching and learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- making sure that assessment strategies give students a clear understanding of the standard of their work and how this can be improved
- agreeing a common approach to investigative science in Key Stage 3.

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

Christine Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector