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Mr D Wise
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Wise

Ofsted survey inspection programme – science

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 3 and 4 November 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; and 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 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.

- The three-year average for progress made by students from the end of Key Stage 2 to the end of Key Stage 4 is significantly above average.
- The outcomes for students in all three sciences and other sciences are significantly above average for grades A* to A and applied science and chemistry outcomes are significantly above average for grades A* to C.

- Outcomes in science at GCSE, compared with all other subjects in the school, are significantly above average overall.
- Standards and achievement are more variable in the sixth form as a consequence of some significant staff changes and variations in cohorts of students.
- The good progress across Key Stages 3 and 4 are a consequence of very well-planned and managed lessons which give students, of the full range of abilities, access to challenging work.
- The standards and progress seen in lessons is aligned well with the assessment data available. Students show a very positive attitude to learning, with hardly any off-task behaviour and high levels of application.
- Students believe they should be actively involved in lessons. They demonstrate responsibility and have a good understanding of their performance through effective assessment which includes self- and peer-evaluation.

Quality of teaching of science

The quality of teaching in science is outstanding.

- All lessons observed show teaching to be good or better. In over one third of lessons seen, the teaching was outstanding.
- Teaching is accurate and skilled and no examples of misconcepts being taught were seen. The teachers are well-qualified and constitute a balanced team of subject specialists.
- There is a strong coherence in the way science is taught. There is good variety of activity and learning approaches that students describe as one of the things they like most about science.
- Teachers clearly expect students to be active learners and to work as scientists. The strong belief that science should be based on scientific enquiry is a key factor in the success of teaching.
- Teachers are very skilled at using questions and answers in targeted ways to check on students' progress and to maintain high levels of engagement.
- Very high-quality planning uses a consistent format that ensures clear objectives, a good understanding of learning hierarchies and a clear appreciation of the range of learning styles that bring about effective learning.
- A great strength of planning is its collaborative nature and the way it provides good flexibility for teachers to choose activities and methods matched to students' needs well.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The curriculum for science is outstanding.

- There is a broad and balanced science curriculum that is centred on providing relevant and engaging work to meet the needs of all students.
- At the heart of the curriculum is the belief that science requires the development of scientific enquiry skills. This priority has led to the senior leadership planning and building facilities, such as the science learning plaza where Year 7 and 8 students learn science in a range of flexible ways.
- The vision for teaching and learning held by the senior leadership team has resulted in a range of courses and pathways being developed to make personalised learning possible. There are academic courses leading to GCSE awards in core, additional, applied and separate sciences. There are vocational courses at two levels of award.
- The curriculum offer for the sixth form is developing with a science in society course introduced this year and applied science planned to be introduced in 2010. These complement A-level courses in physics, biology and chemistry.
- There is a good range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities that students cite as one of the good aspects of science. They also value the variety of activities they experience in science lessons.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

Leadership and management of science are outstanding.

- The senior leadership team has developed an outstanding environment for improvement with a very clear focus on teaching and learning.
- Staff in science are secure in their understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and share the vision of the management and leadership.
- Teachers feel they are enabled to contribute to improvements and they believe their views are listened to.
- The school has a rigorous monitoring and evaluation strategy that is implemented effectively in science.
- Challenging targets are set in science in line with the whole-school policy.
- The science department contributes to continuing professional development in the region through collaboration with other organisations.
- The department has continuing professional development sessions each Wednesday afternoon which promote a common understanding and allow the sharing of good practice.

Areas for improvement

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

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