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Mr M Reynolds
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Reynolds

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: science

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 9 and 10 December 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.

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 is good.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is good.

- Students are making good progress across the age range in the school.
- Outcomes for students have improved over recent years and, at GCSE in 2008, the proportion of students being awarded two or more grades A* to C was significantly higher than the national average.
- Unvalidated data from 2009 show a continuing improvement in standards in science.
- In lessons, students are applying themselves well, are acquiring knowledge and understanding at a good rate and demonstrating good development of science skills.

- Students are well used to working as scientists. They show positive attitudes and good behaviour. They answer questions with confidence and are able to raise their own questions about science.
- Scrutiny of work and discussions with students show that they have good knowledge and understanding of science and that their work is most often complete and presented well.

Quality of teaching of science

The quality of teaching in science is good.

- There are high levels of consistency in the quality of teaching and evidence of a common belief of teachers that that science is best learned most effectively when students are involved and active.
- Teachers use a good variety of techniques and activities to engage students and contribute to their enjoyment.
- Students clearly express their enjoyment of practical work and they explain how it helps them to understand and learn. They dislike being passive, such as in copying work, but they describe how this rarely happens.
- Teachers provide good-quality resources for learning and use information and communication technology effectively to promote learning.
- Teachers' marking of work is of a good standard and is much appreciated by students. There is clear evidence in some of the work that students are responding positively to the written comments of teachers.
- Teachers are effective at using assessment for learning techniques such as formative well-written comments. They have good relationships with students.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The curriculum for science is good.

- The science curriculum has been diversified over the last two years to provide a better match of courses offered to the full range of students' needs.
- Both academic and applied routes are provided to GCSE level and the three separate sciences are provided for those students who have higher attainment and the aspiration to follow these courses.
- Students express contentment with the courses they have chosen and describe how many of the science experiences are related well to everyday life.
- Planning accommodates the range of students' needs and provides suitably challenging experiences.
- There is a good range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

Leadership and management of science are good.

- Management and leadership are based on a systematic approach which is implemented by team working.
- Planning is collaborative with clearly established guidelines for the work.
- Teachers are free to innovate and improve on suggested approaches and these are shared through regular opportunities provided at departmental meetings.
- The virtual learning environment is being developed to capture planning and teaching resources and to make learning materials and assessment tools available to students.
- The leadership has brought about the curriculum diversification and a clear focus on teaching and learning. These have both had a positive impact on the outcomes for students.
- The quality of provision is monitored in a systematic way through classroom observations and work scrutiny. There is provision for peer observations by teachers and paired working to develop good practice.
- Target-setting and evaluation of students' progress is managed well and the data derived used well to inform planning and management.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing peer- and self-assessment by students.

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