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Mr Tony Hartney CBE
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Dear Mr Hartney

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: science

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 8 and 9 December 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 monitoring the impact of recent initiatives and investigating 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and the observation of 11 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science is outstanding.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is outstanding.

- Attainment in science has improved steadily over the past three years.
- At Key Stage 3, students' attainment in science is broadly at national averages. However, taking into account their prior attainment, progress is excellent.
- GCSE pass rates have improved over the past three years. Passes at grades A* to C have improved to national averages. A* and A grade passes improved markedly in 2009.

- Students' progress in science from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 is outstanding. Managers and science teachers recognise that girls from Turkish backgrounds do not always progress as well as others.
- The standard of students' work is good and reflects the way in which their analytical and reasoning skills are being developed in science. Practical work is of a particularly high standard and students of all abilities benefit from this.
- Students' behaviour the in science lessons and around the school is excellent. The school and the science teachers have successfully developed a culture of calm respect which helps the students to focus on their studies. Students work safely in the laboratories.

Quality of teaching in science

Teaching and learning in science are good.

- Lessons are planned well and the teachers are confident in their subject knowledge. Teachers are skilled in the management of students' behaviour and use appropriate praise to develop the confidence of the students when tackling difficult scientific ideas.
- Science lessons have clear objectives which are shared with the students and there is a very good working atmosphere.
- Teaching assistants are well qualified, well briefed and successfully provide support to the students in science lessons.
- Science lessons are resourced well and there is a good balance of practical work and other purposeful activities.
- In all lessons, the students were fully engaged and worked with enthusiasm. All the lessons observed consisted of whole-class activities and there was little evidence of specifically differentiated activities to meet the needs of identified groups or individuals.
- Although teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) well, and classes have good access to an ICT suite, the students rarely use data loggers or remote sensor data to help develop their understanding in science.
- Assessment is excellent and is a key strength of the science team. Tracking and monitoring of students' progress are well developed, up to date and increasingly accurate in the predictions made.
- Students' work is marked regularly and usually contains encouraging and relevant comments on how to improve. However, there is inconsistency in the quality and usefulness of written feedback.
- Students speak enthusiastically about their science studies and about the unstinting support they receive from their teachers.

Quality of the science curriculum

The science curriculum is good

- The Key Stage 3 science curriculum has been extensively reviewed and rewritten for a two-year programme. The focus on 'how science works' has been popular both with the students and the teachers.
- The school now offers separate sciences for the most able students while others follow courses in core and additional science. For those students wanting to follow a vocational course, a BTEC first diploma in science has been introduced. In addition, some students can choose to take BTEC health and social care along with core science to meet their needs and aspirations.
- Enrichment activities in science are good. There is a range of trips and visits to engage and motivate the students. However, the main focus of enrichment is to raise attainment and regular homework clubs take place each week to help the students reach their potential.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

Leadership and management are outstanding

- Science has the full support of a committed and inspirational senior leadership team. A calm and positive atmosphere is generated in the science area and across the school.
- The science team is led outstandingly. The leadership is hard working, resourceful and successfully encourages collaboration across the team of science teachers.
- Continuing professional development for science teachers is organised well and meets the needs of both individual teachers and the development of the curriculum.
- Technical support for the sciences is outstanding. Not only are lessons resourced well, but the technicians serve as a successful communication avenue for teachers to share good practice.
- Additional learning support is well thought through and successfully targeted. Teaching assistants are highly effective in science lessons.
- The science development plan is both accurate and evaluative. Targets are realistic and changed each year to reflect the circumstances. Review processes are well developed.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- using existing enrichment activities to raise attainment for girls from Turkish backgrounds
- developing differentiated activities within lesson plans to meet the full range of ability
- continuing to develop ICT in science, especially data logging
- developing more consistency and follow up to marked work.

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

Alex Falconer
Her Majesty's Inspector