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5 May 2010

Mr A Burns
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Burns

Ofsted 2010-11 subject survey inspection programme: science

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 20 and 21 April 2010 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 staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science is outstanding.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is outstanding.

- Students enter the school in Year 7 with standards below the national average. By the end of Year 11, the percentage of students attaining two or more A* to C GCSE grades or their equivalent is well above the national average.
- The progress made by students between Years 7 and 11 is outstanding.
- In recent years, the progress made by boys has declined from a very high level and was below that of girls in 2009. However, lesson observations and school monitoring data indicate that boys and girls are now making similar progress.
- The standards attained by students in A-level examinations are similar to the national average. Given the ability of students at the start of these courses, their progress in Years 12 and 13 is good.

- Students' behaviour in science lessons is excellent. They are keen to learn and become actively involved in the activities arranged for them by teachers.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in science is good.

- There is a good balance of subject specialist teachers in the department. Their very good subject knowledge is used effectively to improve students' learning and prepare them well for examinations.
- Lessons are well planned using a common planning format.
- Lesson objectives are routinely shared with students at the beginning of lessons to focus their learning. These are referred to effectively at the end of lessons to evaluate the progress they have made.
- There were positive, constructive relationships between staff and students in all the lessons observed.
- The large majority of lessons contain a range of interesting activities pitched at the appropriate level and delivered at a good pace.
- In a few lessons in Years 7 to 11, the tasks set are not sufficiently differentiated to meet the needs of all students.
- Although the quality of marking and feedback to students is good, there is some inconsistency in practice across the department.
- Teaching strategies to promote the independent learning skills of sixth-form students are not yet fully developed.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in science is outstanding.

- The curriculum has a coherent focus on the development of students' skills of enquiry as well as scientific knowledge and understanding.
- It is very well organised and planned to ensure that there is excellent progression in students' learning.
- The range of academic and vocational science courses offered to students in Years 10 to 13 meets their learning needs, interests and abilities extremely well.
- The BTEC vocational science course, followed by some students in Years 10 and 11, is having a very positive impact on raising standards in science.
- The courses on offer in the sixth form ensure that there are good progression routes in place for students who have taken either academic or vocational courses in Key Stage 4.
- A broad range of science enrichment activities is available to students including Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 science clubs, a specialism week in Year 7 and 'Science on Stage'. These activities enhance students' enjoyment of science and provide them with memorable experiences.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in science is outstanding.

- The head of department has shared and established a clear vision in the science department very effectively. The vision is based on ensuring that all students enjoy science and achieve highly.
- Roles and responsibilities in science have been skilfully delegated. As a result, staff feel valued and supported and work together well as a team.
- Systems for monitoring and evaluation are strong. The department has a very clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and a good plan is in place to tackle identified areas in need of improvement.
- Teaching is very well monitored and good strategies are in place to share and develop the good and outstanding practice that is present in the department.
- An excellent system is in place to monitor students' progress towards challenging targets. Those who are underachieving are quickly identified and provided with good support. This system is having a positive impact on students' progress.
- Science specialism work is led and managed very well and is having a positive impact on students' outcomes across the school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that all lessons in Years 7 to 11 contain tasks that are well matched to the ability of students in the class
- continuing to promote and develop teaching strategies that enhance the independent learning skills of sixth-form students.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop science in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website under the URN for your school. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Peter Sanderson
Her Majesty's Inspector