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Ms A Barnes
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Barnes

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 9 and 10 June 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 without their consent.

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

The overall effectiveness of science is satisfactory.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is satisfactory.

- Attainment in science at both Key Stages 3 and 4 is broadly in line with the national average. Success rates are good for the students studying science in the sixth form.
- Students' progress relative to their starting points is satisfactory at all three key stages.
- The vast majority of students show positive attitudes to their learning. They are keen to contribute in group tasks and work productively on individual activities. Students particularly enjoy practical activities and opportunities to investigate scientific questions. However, a small minority are sometimes reluctant to be fully engaged in learning activities and their behaviour does not always meet the school's high expectations.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in science is satisfactory.

- Teaching was good in just over half of the lessons seen.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is strong and is used well to answer students' questions and make links between different areas of learning.
- The majority of lessons are well planned to meet students' needs, incorporating a series of engaging activities that support the intended learning well.
- Most teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) effectively to support learning and provide opportunities for students to develop their ICT skills.
- In a minority of lessons, teacher talk dominates and activities are less effective in ensuring students develop their independent learning skills.
- The effectiveness of the use of assessment to support learning is variable. Periodic oral and written feedback, for example following a test or assessed task, is effective in helping students to understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. The use of day to day assessment, including opportunities for students to assess their own learning and that of their peers, is less well embedded.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in science is satisfactory.

- Schemes of work are detailed with recent revisions, particularly at Key Stage 3, increasing opportunities for science knowledge and understanding to be taught through a range of interesting contexts.
- Experiences to develop students' investigative skills and encourage them to think scientifically are incorporated at all key stages.
- The breadth of the curriculum at Key Stage 4 was increased in September 2009 with the introduction of the option for students to study three separate sciences. However, the needs and interests of all students are not yet well met because courses for students to study science in an applied context are not available.
- The establishment of an outdoor classroom and links with external partners are helping to enrich the curriculum and broaden students' science experience.
- Students appreciate the wide range of additional help for their learning that is available from staff through both formal revision sessions and individual support.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

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

- The experienced and committed team within the science department support each other well.
- Students' targets are set and their progress towards them is regularly checked. However, not all targets are sufficiently challenging. For some students, successfully meeting their target would not represent good or better progress.
- Leaders are aware of the main strengths and weaknesses within science provision, although the evaluation of the quality of teaching and its impact on students' learning lacks sharpness. Consequently, the precise actions needed to bring about improvement in teaching and students' learning are not always identified.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- considering how the curriculum could be developed further so that it meets the needs of all students well
- improving the rigour with which provision is monitored and evaluated to pinpoint areas for development more accurately
- using existing good practice to increase the proportion of good or better teaching and ensure assessment is used consistently well so that all students develop their independent learning skills and make good progress
- reviewing the degree of challenge of students' science targets.

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

Katrina Gueli
Her Majesty's Inspector