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Mrs P Bevan
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Bevan

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: science

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 8 and 9 June 2011 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 seven lessons. During this inspection, Year 11, 12 and 13 students were on study leave.

The overall effectiveness of science is satisfactory.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is satisfactory.

- Students' attainment on entry into Year 8 is similar to the national average. The percentage of Year 11 students attaining two or more A* to C GCSE grades in science in 2010 was below the national average. However, attainment in science is rising and current Year 11 students are on track to attain results close to the national average this summer.
- Over the past few years, students' progress in science has been below other subjects in the school. However, students' progress in science is improving.
- All groups of students make similar progress.
- Students are developing their skills of scientific enquiry well and this is evident in their improving GCSE coursework scores.

- Students are keen to do well, work safely and sensibly in lessons and demonstrate good attitudes to learning. They enjoy science and, consequently, the numbers choosing to study science in the sixth form are increasing.
- The progress made by sixth-form students on AS and A2 science courses was satisfactory in 2010. Current monitoring data indicate students' progress is improving.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in science is satisfactory.

- Teaching in science has improved since the last whole school inspection one year ago.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and provide students with clear explanations that aid their learning.
- Teachers are enthusiastic about their subject and positively encourage students during lessons.
- Most teachers use a broad range of activities during lessons to actively engage students in learning.
- Most teachers make effective use of assessment strategies to check and develop students' learning. In the best lessons, teachers alter their teaching as a result of this assessment. This good practice is not consistent across the department.
- Teachers make effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) to aid students' learning through the use of digital presentations and interactive whiteboards. However, opportunities for students to use ICT to aid their learning in science are underdeveloped.
- Students, particularly those in the sixth form, are appreciative of the additional help and support they receive from teachers outside of lessons.
- Written feedback to students varies in frequency and quality across the department.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in science is satisfactory.

- Much of the science is taught in relevant contexts that makes it interesting for students and engages them well.
- The curriculum has a good focus on the development of students' skills of scientific enquiry.
- An increasing number of students is choosing to follow the triple award science course in Years 10 and 11 and this is meeting their needs well. However, the school does not offer a vocational course in science.
- The time allocated for students taking core science in Key Stage 4 is below recommended levels.

- Opportunities for enrichment of the science curriculum are satisfactory.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

The effectiveness of leadership and management in science is good.

- The new head of science has raised expectations within the department and is providing a clear vision for improvement.
- The head of science has created a leadership structure in science that is holding all teachers suitably accountable for students' progress while at the same time providing them with good levels of support.
- Effective use has been made of external agencies, such as the local National Science Learning Centre and consultants, to improve the quality of teaching in the department.
- Science leaders have developed a good system to monitor the progress of students towards their challenging targets. Good systems are in place to support those students who are underachieving and this is beginning to raise attainment.
- The monitoring of teaching and marking is not ensuring consistency of good practice across the department.
- A good improvement plan is in place to address areas of weakness.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the curriculum time in Key Stage 4 for GCSE core science
- ensuring that all teachers frequently assess students' developing knowledge and understanding during lessons and, where appropriate, alter their teaching as a result of this assessment
- ensuring that all marking gives students clear and helpful advice about how to improve their work
- increasing the range of opportunities for students to use ICT to aid their learning.

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

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Peter Sanderson
Her Majesty's Inspector