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Mr J Winch
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Winch

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: science

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

The overall effectiveness of science is outstanding.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is outstanding.

- Pupils enter the school with attainment above average and make good progress by the end of Key Stage 4. In 2010 the proportion of students achieving at least two grade Cs or above at GCSE was 78%, significantly above average.
- In 2010 the proportion of students achieving A* to A grades at GCSE in sciences is significantly above average.
- Compared with other subjects in the school, outcomes for students in the sciences are below the school average.
- At A level, performance is slightly above the national average.

- Students are keen to do well and good standards of work are seen in class and through the scrutiny of books. Work is complete and presented well and students are undoubtedly taking good care with their work.
- Students' behaviour was at least good in every lesson seen and overall was outstanding. High levels of respect exist between staff and students.

Quality of teaching of science

The quality of teaching of science is outstanding.

- Teaching was at least good in all lessons seen and outstanding in a significant proportion.
- Teachers demonstrate very good subject knowledge alongside very good teaching skills. There is a culture of very good relationships, respect and concern for the success of individuals.
- The culture of responsibility for learning ensures that teachers expect students to be active participants in lessons and not to have passive attitudes to work.
- Students describe how available teachers are to answer their questions, and help them to overcome problems that they encounter with the work. This help is provided within lessons but also at other times, such as after school.
- Teachers use a range of techniques to engage students and students speak very positively of the quality of teaching that they receive.
- As a result of the strong ethos for learning and the effective planning and teaching, students apply themselves very well to the work.
- Assessment is systematic and thorough. Students appreciate the quality of assessment and feedback that they receive. They particularly value the information on how to improve but report that it is not always consistent.
- Information and communication technology is used well, including the development of a virtual learning environment that is accessible to students and contains a wide range of resources for learning.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the science curriculum is outstanding.

- Much of the science is taught in relevant contexts that makes it interesting for students and engages them well.
- The courses provided cover the requirements of the National Curriculum and follow approved specifications at GCSE and A level.
- There is a range of pathways for students to study science from age 14 to 19 that meets the needs of the full range of students.

- The curriculum is reviewed continually to evaluate its effectiveness through careful analysis of performance data.
- Cross-curricular links are seen in practice although they are not planned explicitly in all schemes of work.
- Opportunities for enrichment of the science curriculum are good and a good range of extra-curricular activities is available.
- Students express their appreciation of the wide range of opportunities that they have and describe how they like the variety of available learning activities.

Leadership and management of science

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

- You and the senior leadership team have created an environment in which science leaders are accountable yet free to exercise their skills of innovation such as those deployed in establishing science courses.
- Monitoring and evaluation of outcomes are effective which allows you and other managers to keep track of the progress made.
- The leadership in science provides a clear vision of what contributes to effective science education and supports the members of the science department well.
- The leadership in science gives a clear account of the standards attained by students and is vigilant in carrying out effective monitoring and evaluation of performance.
- As a result, the approach to science teaching is very coherent, building on a shared vision, sharing good practice and focusing on students' needs.

Areas for improvement:

- There are no additional areas for improvement to those that the school has recognised and made strategic plans for.

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

Ian Richardson
Her Majesty's Inspector