

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs K Morris
Headteacher
Brook Acre Community Primary School
Hilden Road
Padgate
Warrington
WA2 0JP

Dear Mrs Morris

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: science

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 15 September 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 pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; observation of three lessons and a brief visit to the Reception class.

The overall effectiveness of science is satisfactory.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is satisfactory.

- National tests and teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 2 show that standards have generally been between average and below average in recent years. Few pupils have reached Level 5 in the last two years.
- In the lessons observed, pupils often made good progress as a result of good teaching. Scrutiny of books showed that progress over time is broadly satisfactory. Weak literacy skills often hinder progress in the longer term and pupils are more confident talking about their learning in science than writing about it.
- Behaviour is good. Pupils have good attitudes towards learning in science lessons and participate enthusiastically.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in science is good.

- Teachers have good relationships with their pupils. They are encouraging and enthusiastic. The levels of trust and respect in classrooms and around the school are high. The environment for learning is positive.
- Pupils speak enthusiastically about their learning in science and clearly enjoy their lessons.
- Teachers make some effective use of questions and answers to establish prior knowledge, check understanding and encourage pupils to think about their learning.
- In the lessons observed, a variety of activities was used well to motivate pupils and encourage them to think. For example, talk partners were used effectively to give pupils opportunities to discuss their ideas with others.
- In the better lessons, teachers avoid talking for too long and careful planning ensures they make good use of time, including suitable practical activities. Pupils are thus engaged and learning all the time. For example, in a Year 6 lesson an activity to measure the effect of exercise on heart rate was carried out quickly and efficiently, allowing plenty of time to explore the reasons for this back in the classroom.
- Good use is made of strategies that provide repetition and reinforcement of key points. One example seen was in a Year 4 lesson where a song reinforced learning about bacteria and disease effectively.
- In the lessons observed, opportunities for pupils to write about science were few.
- Much of the teaching seen was directed at the whole class. This met most pupils' needs. Teaching assistants provide helpful support to those who need it and teachers have higher expectations of the more able. However, on occasion, opportunities to stretch the more able were missed.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in science is good.

- The curriculum is based around themed 'learning journeys' which are usually chosen by the pupils themselves. Science is carefully integrated where it fits logically, which ensures that much science is taught within a relevant context. Discrete science units are added to ensure full National Curriculum coverage, and again this is contextualised and appropriate cross-curricular links made.
- Enrichment activities are used very well, which is a strong feature of the school. These add significantly to pupils' engagement and enjoyment. Visits to local museums, a hands-on science centre and pond-dipping are recent examples.

- Information and communication technology is used effectively to enhance the science curriculum. Teachers make appropriate use of electronic whiteboards and pupils have plenty of opportunities to use laptops.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

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

- You and the two senior teachers acting as science coordinators have a clear focus on raising attainment in science.
- Records of monitoring and evaluation of pupils' work during 2009/10 show a thorough and detailed approach. This revealed some inconsistencies, for example in the quality of marking, which have been tackled. Plans are in place to further develop monitoring and evaluation this year and to use the information to identify staff development needs.
- Much of the ongoing assessment by teachers in lessons is informal, and planning shows adjustments are made to take account of this. However, no system is in place to formally record and monitor the progress of all pupils in science. Plans are in place to introduce this later in the year.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing an assessment system to ensure that all pupils' progress in science is monitored consistently throughout the school, and the information used to help raise attainment
- providing more opportunities for pupils to develop their scientific literacy skills
- consolidating the leadership and management of science to ensure that there is an appropriate emphasis on raising achievement in science.

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, copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Ruth James
Her Majesty's Inspector