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8 April 2011

Mr P Swift
Principal
South Cheshire College
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Dear Mr Swift

**Ofsted 2010–11 good practice survey inspection programme:
improving science in colleges**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 7 and 8 February 2011 as part of our survey in science.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to a national report. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributors or contributing institutions but individuals and institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence base included: discussions with staff and students; observations of six lessons; a review of documentation; and a tour of the science facilities with a technician.

Features of good practice

- Pass, retention and success rates are high for most science courses.
- Science teachers are very well qualified. They are enthusiastic about their subjects and they successfully convey this to their students.
- Teaching is consistently good and some lessons are outstanding. Lessons are well planned and structured. Learning outcomes are very clear. Teachers use a very good range of teaching and learning activities in lessons.
- Relationships between teachers and students are excellent. Teachers know their students very well and are supportive and encouraging. Students are extremely positive about the teaching they receive.
- Very effective differentiation was observed in a national diploma lesson, which met the needs of students of different abilities well.

- Practical investigations are used very well to enhance learning. These are well organised and good use is made of technician support to ensure that students gain the maximum benefit from their work.
- Some effective use is made of information and communication technology in lessons. As well as presentations, teachers make good use of visual material, including animations and video clips.
- Teachers are careful to explain concepts clearly with an appropriate emphasis on scientific terminology. Good use is made of effective questioning, often targeted at individuals. Questions encourage students to think and to work things out for themselves.
- Teachers take care to prepare students well for external examinations, particularly through the use of past paper questions. The virtual learning environment provides additional opportunities for independent learning.
- Learning materials are well designed and presented and include useful induction packs and handbooks.
- An excellent range of courses is offered including AS and A levels in physics, chemistry, biology and science in society, GCSE science and additional science, first and national diplomas, and science units as part of the Access to Higher Education provision.
- Advice and guidance are very effective in ensuring that students choose appropriate courses and are well prepared for university applications.
- Underachievement is identified and workshop provision is used well to support students to help them reach their target grades. Enrichment activities, such as 'How to get an A grade', also contribute to raising achievement. Some good use is made of teachers' industry links to provide enrichment opportunities.
- Students' individual learning targets and the records of progress against these provide valuable information for teachers and managers.
- The quality improvement plan accurately notes that value-added data show that progress on some courses is satisfactory. Strategies have been implemented to address this and, though signs of improvement are encouraging, it is too early to see the full impact on outcomes.
- The laboratories in the new building provide a modern scientific learning environment.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- continuing to develop and implement strategies to improve rates of progress by further increasing the pace of lessons and providing clear guidance and support to help students develop independent learning skills so that more time is spent on study outside the classroom
- improving progression from AS to A2 courses, particularly for chemistry.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop science provision.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to the relevant funding bodies and will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

Ruth James
Her Majesty's Inspector