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Mr M Saqib
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Saqib

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 13 and 14 July 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 five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science is good.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is good.

- The percentage of students attaining two or more A* to C grades at GCSE has declined in recent years but remains significantly above the national average. The percentage of Year 11 students attaining the higher A* and A grades was broadly average in 2010. School data and inspection evidence indicate that Year 11 students' attainment is set to rise in the summer.
- Students make good progress between Years 7 and 11. Current Year 11 students have made better progress in the development of their knowledge and understanding of science than in their skills of scientific enquiry. However, current Year 10 students are making better progress in the development of their scientific enquiry skills.
- The progress made by boys, particularly Pakistani boys, is below that of girls.

- Students enjoy science, particularly when they are given the opportunity to carry out practical work. Students would like the opportunity to undertake more practical work but recognise that these opportunities are limited by the science accommodation in the school.
- Students' behaviour in lessons is outstanding and they display very good attitudes to learning.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in science is good.

- Teachers plan lessons well, and most include activities that are well matched to students' learning needs. However, a minority of lessons do not provide sufficient challenge for high attaining students.
- Lessons provide students with good opportunities to actively engage in learning tasks or group discussions.
- Relationships between students and staff are of good quality and positive. Teachers are enthusiastic, energetic and encouraging of students.
- The department does not contain a teacher with a degree in the physical sciences. However, effective use has been made of the 'Physics Factory' to support the development of teachers' subject knowledge in this area of science. Teachers' subject knowledge was good in the lessons observed.
- In the best lessons, teachers are making good use of questioning and other assessment strategies to check the learning of all students and they alter their teaching in response to this assessment. This good practice is not consistent across the department.
- Students know their targets and regular feedback through tests and assessments ensures that they know how well they are doing against these targets.
- Books are marked regularly but the quality of marking varies across the department. Students are not consistently given clear and helpful advice about how to improve their learning.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in science is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is well planned and organised with good progression in the development of scientific ideas. New scientific concepts and ideas are taught through contexts that are relevant and interesting to students.
- Opportunities for students to develop their skills of scientific enquiry are integrated into schemes of work. However, opportunities for students to complete practical work are limited by the school's science accommodation. The amount of practical work undertaken by different classes also varies.

- The courses offered to students in Key Stage 4 meet their needs and aspirations well; this range will be sensibly broadened from September 2011 by the introduction of a vocational course in science.
- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance students' learning is underdeveloped.
- Students' understanding and enjoyment of science are enhanced through visits, such as the Year 10 trip to the Centre for Alternative Technology and the Key Stage 3 trip to a safari park and through links with local universities and the 'Physics Factory'.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

The effectiveness of leadership and management in science is good.

- Senior leaders have effectively delegated responsibility to the head of science so that he can lead change in the subject while at the same time holding him accountable for students' achievement.
- The new head of department is well informed of recent subject initiatives and has created a clear vision for the development of science. He has developed the opportunities for staff to share resources and ideas with each other effectively.
- The monitoring of teaching is regular and accurate and subsequent support for teachers is having a positive impact on improving their practice.
- Students' progress towards challenging targets is being well tracked by the science leader.
- The establishment of a new science teaching area from September 2011 provides the department with the opportunity to increase students' use of ICT and complete more practical work in science.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving boys' achievement, particularly boys of Pakistani ethnicity
- ensuring that all staff provide students with clear and helpful advice about how to improve their learning
- ensuring that the new science teaching area, available from September 2011, is used effectively by all teachers to improve students' practical experience of science including their use of ICT.

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