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Mr J Doyle  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Doyle

### **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 19 and 20 September 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science is good.

#### **Achievement in science**

Achievement in science is good.

- Students arrive at the school with above average attainment and make good progress in science. Well above average proportions of students reach the expected and higher levels in teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3. The proportions of students gaining two or more GCSE A\* to C grades or equivalent in science are well above the national averages and increasing over time.
- In the sixth form, A level pass rates are high and students who complete A levels make good progress from their starting points. Outcomes at the end of Year 12 are variable. In 2010 and 2011, pass rates for AS chemistry were high, but low for AS biology. Progression from AS levels to the full A level varies, largely depending on the AS outcomes.

- Most students display good attitudes to learning, but in a minority of lessons a few students show low-level inattention and are slow to engage with the activities set, or are reluctant to collaborate in group activities.

### **Quality of teaching in science**

The quality of teaching in science is good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and take care to provide clear explanations. They are enthusiastic, committed and caring, and establish good relationships with their students.
- Lessons include a good range of learning activities to engage interest, motivate, and develop knowledge and understanding. However, in a minority of lessons teachers did not always adapt the activities in the light of students' responses.
- There is some effective use of information and communication technology to enhance learning. The virtual learning environment has a wide selection of valuable materials which students can access from school or home.
- Students are very positive about lessons which they enjoy, especially the practical and experimental work. Most practical work is teacher-directed, although students have a few opportunities to plan their own investigations.
- Learning materials are well designed and provide plenty of opportunities for students to practise skills and reinforce learning.
- Students know their targets and their progress towards these. Students' progress is assessed regularly and recorded systematically. Work in students' books is well presented and marked regularly. Helpful comments are often added which help students understand how to improve.
- Occasionally, in lessons, teachers' monitoring of individuals' work is not thorough enough for support to be targeted effectively when students are inattentive or slow to get started. In such lessons, the pace tends to be steady rather than rapid.

### **Quality of the curriculum in science**

The quality of the curriculum in science is good.

- The school offers a very good range of courses at Key Stage 4 which meets students' needs well. This includes GCSEs in science, additional science, physics, chemistry and biology, and a vocational course. Students are given appropriate guidance about courses in terms of their future aspirations.
- The sixth form has a good range of courses including AS and A levels in physics, chemistry and biology, and a vocational course which provides a valuable progression route.
- Good use is made of links with local universities. Enrichment activities also include a science club for younger students.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum has recently been reviewed and is currently being adapted to better prepare students for GCSE study, particularly those who may wish to study three separate sciences.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in science**

Leadership and management in science are good.

- Leadership and management have clearly been effective in improving outcomes at the end of Key Stage 4 in recent years.
- Self-evaluation is very thorough and includes detailed data analyses.
- Students' progress is monitored comprehensively and interventions planned where underachievement is identified.
- The senior leadership advocacy system provides a supportive framework for the development of science and has strengthened monitoring and evaluation at a senior level.
- Much in-house professional development includes whole-school strategies to improve teaching and learning, and sharing of good practice within the departments. External science-specific professional development opportunities are mainly related to examining board requirements.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- further developing the quality of teaching in science to increase the proportion of good and outstanding lessons
- enhancing and developing support strategies for sixth-form students, especially in Year 12, so that outcomes and progression are more consistent
- providing more opportunities for independent work, including investigations where students design, plan and carry out their own experiments.

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

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

Yours sincerely

**Ruth James**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**