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4 February 2013

Miss C Jibunoh
Principal
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Dear Miss Jibunoh

Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: science

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 22 and 23 January 2013 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 part-lessons, a 'master class' for a group of Year 5 pupils taught by an Eastlea teacher and three short lesson visits.

The overall effectiveness of science is good.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is good.

- Students achieve well in science relative to their starting points. There has been a strong rising trend in the proportion of students attaining A* to C GCSE grades. The proportion of students achieving the highest grades has similarly improved. This reflects teachers' high aspirations for students and their commitment to ensuring each individual does as well as they can.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs, students who speak English as an additional language and those eligible for the Pupil Premium make good progress because the curriculum, teaching resources and additional support provided meet their needs well.

- Students interviewed said they enjoy science, noting in particular that practical work and teacher demonstrations help them to develop a better understanding of ideas and concepts in science.
- Almost all students who gained three separate GCSE science qualifications in 2012 have gone on to study at least one science subject at AS level.
- In lessons, students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and most work well together, supporting the learning of their peers, in paired or group activities.
- Occasionally, where teaching is not well planned, or approaches do not inspire or enthuse, students become passive and learning slows.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in science is good.

- Teachers have a good subject knowledge which ensures that they explain ideas and concepts effectively, for example by using models to illustrate abstract concepts.
- Careful planning and choice of resources ensure that teaching meets the needs of different groups of learners well, building on their prior learning and providing good challenge for students including the higher attainers.
- Support staff and science technicians make a good contribution to supporting learning in lessons.
- Science tasks promote the development of students' literacy skills well. Technical language is emphasised and there are frequent opportunities for students to improve their reading and written communication skills.
- Many effective strategies are deployed to enable the significant number of students at a very early stage of English language acquisition to fully access the science curriculum. Bilingual resources, support staff, effective peer support and good use of translation software all make a difference.
- In most lessons, teachers check students' understanding carefully and adjust their teaching as necessary. Occasionally, teachers do not ensure all students have successfully grasped key concepts.
- Marking typically identifies how students could improve their work. There is little evidence of students responding to teacher questions and prompts so the impact of written feedback on learning and progress is reduced.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in science is good.

- The curriculum is regularly reviewed and adjusted to ensure it meets the needs of different students well. The Key Stage 4 courses on offer enable students to be successful in science and enjoy their learning.
- Students interviewed confirmed that teachers link their science learning to its importance in society and everyday life. While this was observed in

most lessons, occasionally, unfamiliar ideas and concepts are not introduced well enough to set the learning in a meaningful context.

- There is a diverse range of enrichment activities including science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) experiences that contribute effectively to students' enjoyment and achievement in science.
- A variety of outreach work with local primary schools is proving increasingly popular and provides valuable learning opportunities that promote pupils' enthusiasm and curiosity well.

Effectiveness of leadership in, and management of, science

The effectiveness of leadership in, and management of, science is good.

- The curriculum team leader has a strong focus on driving improvement. The findings of monitoring and evaluation are used effectively to identify areas for development. Actions taken have successfully led to rising standards, improvements in teaching quality and a curriculum that is better matched to students' needs.
- Leaders rightly recognise that some inconsistencies in teaching quality remain, and the curriculum at Key Stage 3 needs further refinement.
- Assessment data are used well to identify those students at risk of underachievement and hold teachers to account for the progress of students that they teach. A very broad range of classroom-based and wider intervention work helps to ensure students get back on track.
- Good collaboration and sharing of best practice contribute effectively to addressing whole school and departmental priorities.
- Professional development is carefully planned to meet individual training needs. A local authority advanced skills teacher is giving support to specific teachers. Expertise within science and other subject departments provides bespoke training and support to develop the skills of others.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring all lessons are taught in an inspiring and interesting way to consistently promote good learning and progress
- improving the impact of marking and written feedback by enabling students to respond to teachers' comments and questions.

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

Katrina Gueli
Her Majesty's Inspector