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30 March 2007

Mrs F Burgess
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Dear Mrs Burgess

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 26–27 March 2007 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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in science are satisfactory.

- Achievement is satisfactory overall, and it is good in some Year 8 classes where the classes experience specialist science teaching.
- The achievement of the highest attaining pupils is still inconsistent, though improving, since their unsatisfactory performance in the end of Year 6 national tests in 2006.
- Pupils with learning difficulties achieve well due to good support.
- Pupils have good subject knowledge and some pupils explain their understanding well, using correct terminology. However, many pupils are not quite so secure in their understanding because there are not enough

planned opportunities for pupils to explain their understanding, either in speech or writing.

- Pupils' investigative skills are satisfactory overall but pupils do not propose their own investigations or, predict possible results, plan and carry them out.
- Pupils have good information and communication and technology (ICT) and numeracy skills that develop well through science.
- Pupils' personal development is good. They have good attitudes to science, they behave safely and considerately in practical lessons and most enjoy the subject.

Quality of teaching and learning of Science

The quality of teaching and learning in science is satisfactory.

- Teachers have satisfactory subject knowledge overall and in some cases it is good.
- Lessons are well organised with clear learning objectives, but sometimes a little too specific, taking away the element of discovery for pupils.
- Work is generally planned to meet the learning needs of all pupils. It is good for average and lower attaining pupils. It is inconsistent for the most able pupils, though improving.
- Investigations are frequently included in lessons, although they sometimes have too clearly described outcomes so that pupils know what they are intended to find out. They are also occasionally too tightly planned, denying pupils the opportunity to test their own ideas or to plan and carry out their own experiments.
- In some lessons pupils do not have enough opportunities to discuss and write about their understanding. Sometimes teachers give too much information to pupils, when questioning them or discussing ideas would contribute more effectively to their learning. Where they do engage in discussion or write independently, pupils explain their knowledge and understanding confidently and accurately.
- Teachers include ICT activities in their lessons frequently and usually this enhances learning. However, occasionally some of the ICT activities are trivial and do not contribute significantly to pupils' learning.
- The starts of lessons are not consistently organised to prepare pupils properly for the main learning objectives of the lessons. Similarly the ends of lessons do not consistently draw together the main ideas being taught. Nevertheless, lessons are planned around the three-part structure encouraged in national policy.
- Teachers' marking is often good, giving clear information about how well pupils are performing and what they need to do to improve further, but this is not consistent. Many pupils do not know what their targets are.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- There are some planned activities for the most able pupils, but they are not always evident in lessons. The impact of this is inconsistent progress by some more able pupils in Years 7 and 8, particularly where there is non-specialist teaching.
- Numeracy and ICT are integrated well into the scheme of work, though the relevance of some of the ICT used has not been adequately evaluated.
- Literacy in science is well planned, but the intentions are not fully realised, with too few opportunities for pupils to write independently or to speak and discuss the subject.
- There are many planned investigations in the curriculum, though they are too tightly structured for pupils to engage fully in the processes of hypothesising, predicting, planning, measuring, observing and explaining.

Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management of science are satisfactory.

- The subject leader provides good support for colleagues, especially in Year 8 where there is some non-specialist science teaching.
- Science resources are well organised and managed and the school makes good use of its limited specialist accommodation.
- The introduction of ICT into science teaching has been good, although the impact of some of resources used has not been fully evaluated.
- The approaches to improve assessment and use of assessment information to involve pupils more comprehensively in self-assessment and recognising their own strengths and weaknesses are good. However, the systems are not yet fully implemented so it is too early to measure the intended impact.
- The analysis of data and results and tracking pupils' progress is good, though measures to overcome some recent underperformance are not fully in place yet.
- The subject self-evaluation does not give a clear view of how provision in the subject could be improved in order to improve achievement. Nevertheless, the subject leader is aware of where some weaknesses are, and is pushing forward with work for most able pupils.
- The contribution of continuing professional development is satisfactory, though the school has not made any use of the regional science learning centres.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is satisfactory.

- Pupils with learning difficulties achieve well due to good, sensitive support.

- Minority ethnic pupils perform equally as well as others and there are no significant differences between the achievement of boys and girls.
- The achievement of the most able pupils is variable. This is due mainly to inconsistent provision of work matched to their learning needs, but it is improving.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the achievement of the most able pupils by ensuring work is consistently matched to their learning needs
- improving the teaching of science investigation so that pupils are engaged in hypothesising, planning and carrying out investigations of their own
- providing more opportunities for pupils to express their knowledge and understanding fully in speaking and writing
- making sure that marking consistently informs pupils about how well they are doing and what they need to do to make further progress
- improving the quality of the subject self-evaluation process.

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

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Ted Wheatley
Additional Inspector