

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr J Wade
The Principal
South Molton Community College
Old Alswear Road
South Molton
Devon
EX36 4LA

Dear Mr Wade

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 20 October 2008 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 made included: discussions with you, the head of department and students, observation of two lessons, scrutiny of documents and scrutiny of students' work.

Features of good practice observed

- The head of science has high expectations of all students and staff. He sets a clear agenda and direction for improvement based on raising students' enjoyment and achievement in science.
- The science team contains staff with a good range of experience and expertise. They work extremely well together to provide the very best opportunities for all students.
- Schemes of work contain a good balance of activities and have a clear focus on the development of scientific skills. They are stored electronically on a central system and are regularly updated and improved by all staff to ensure that they better meet the needs of students.
- Teachers are held accountable for the progress of students through a rigorous system of self evaluation. Lessons, exercise books and examination results are regularly reviewed to ensure that students are making the best possible progress.

- The department has an excellent system for assessing students' progress in both the knowledge and understanding of science and the development of scientific skills in Years 7 to 9.
- The department has a very good central system for tracking the progress of students towards their targets. Underachievement is identified and action taken to support students to raise their performance.
- Students know their targets, how well doing and what they need to do to improve.
- Technology college status has brought extra funding into the department allowing the expansion of resources available for teaching and learning. This in turn has had an impact in helping to raise standards of attainment in both key stages.
- The school deploys staff effectively, and from Year 10 onwards students are taught individual subject modules by subject specialists. Students appreciate the advice and help they are given by teachers in preparation for examinations and coursework assessments.
- Lessons contain a range of activities that actively engage students in learning and are pitched at a level appropriate to their ability.
- The value added measure of achievement is very high, giving evidence that students' achievement in science at the end of Key Stage 3 is around the top ten percent of schools nationally.
- Students enjoy science and their attitudes to learning and behaviour were excellent in the lessons observed during this visit.
- All students are provided with the necessary resources to allow for independent study to consolidate their learning at home.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- continuing to review the Key Stage 4 curriculum to further improve students' enjoyment of science.

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

As I explained previously, 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

Peter Sanderson
Her Majesty's Inspector