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Mr C Teal
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Dear Mr Teal

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 9 and 10 March 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 10 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science is good.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is good.

- Students' attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 has been significantly above the national average over the last three years and has improved at a faster rate than the national trend.
- Students make good progress overall, although progress varies between key stages.
- Students enjoy science and this is reflected in the increasing number choosing to study three separate science subjects during Key Stage 4 and opting to continue their science studies in the school's sixth form.
- They engage well in lessons and work with enthusiasm to explore scientific questions by planning and carrying out investigations.

- Students' collaborative approach to learning, including their willingness to ask questions and share ideas, helps to develop their knowledge and understanding.
- A small minority of students have less well-developed literacy skills and this limits the effectiveness with which they can communicate their scientific knowledge and understanding orally or in writing.
- Students in Key Stages 4 and 5 are aware of their targets and receive regular helpful feedback from teachers, for example, in homework books, to ensure that they know how to improve. This good practice is less well embedded in Key Stage 3.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in science is good.

- Teachers plan lessons carefully, setting learning in an interesting and relevant context that engages students well. Most notably, teachers place the responsibility for learning on the students by providing open-ended tasks and using effective questions to prompt their thinking. This approach underpins the successful development of students' independent learning skills.
- Good teaching is typified by high expectations of what students can achieve, brisk pace, challenging tasks and effective support for learners' differing needs.
- In a small minority of lessons observed, successful learning was not sufficiently well modelled or structured by the teacher and consequently students' progress was satisfactory rather than good.
- Teachers make good use of assessment to check students' understanding and use this information effectively to adjust teaching in the lesson or inform future planning.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in science is good.

- The curriculum is well balanced with a strong emphasis on developing students' understanding of scientific enquiry and the importance of science in society; promoting students' achievement and enjoyment well.
- The thematic approach to the curriculum in Years 7 and 8 provides frequent opportunities for students to explore scientific questions, consider differing evidence and evaluate their findings.
- The curriculum at Key Stage 4 meets students' learning needs well because it has been reviewed and thoughtfully developed to incorporate a range of vocational and academic qualifications that is used flexibly.
- Visits from scientists at the forefront of research, university links and educational trips effectively enrich the curriculum, particularly for students in Key Stages 4 and 5.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

Leadership and management in science are good.

- The head of faculty has a clear vision and has worked well with his team to successfully drive improvement in provision and outcomes for students.
- Monitoring and evaluation of students' outcomes and provision are thorough and, consequently, the head of faculty has a good knowledge of the strengths and areas for development within the subject.
- Challenging targets have been used effectively to raise standards at Key Stages 4 and 5.
- Detailed analysis of examination results coupled with robust tracking of students' current progress ensure that reasons for students' underperformance are quickly identified and addressed.
- Internal and external professional development opportunities have been used effectively to improve leadership and management, enhance teaching quality, support curriculum development and address the individual learning needs of teachers in the department.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- extending good practice in the use of challenging targets and written feedback to accelerate students' progress during Key Stage 3
- improving students' literacy skills to ensure that literacy is not a barrier to students' learning and progress in science
- ensuring that teachers model successful learning consistently and scaffold students' higher order thinking carefully.

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

Katrina Gueli
Her Majesty's Inspector