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Mr M McNichol
Headteacher
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Dear Mr McNichol

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 06 February 2008 to look at work in science.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on transition within and between phases (F-KS1-KS2-KS3); the range of learning experiences; the status and use of SC1.

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 analysis of data, interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, pupils' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are about average.

- Pupils make satisfactory progress in science.
- At Key Stage 2, in 2007 most pupils achieved at least level 4. The proportion achieving level 5 was slightly below the national average. Pupils generally achieve the levels they are capable of given their starting points and circumstances.
- In lessons pupils are attentive and keen to learn.

- Pupils develop good social skills, independent learning skills, and information and communication technology (ICT) skills through their science lessons.
- Behaviour observed in lessons was very good.

Quality of teaching and learning of science

Teaching and learning are good.

- Teachers have very good relationships with their pupils and give plenty of encouragement.
- Lessons are very well planned.
- Very good use is made of ICT in teaching and learning. In one lesson very good use was made of a virtual experiment simulating evaporation and condensation. Good use was made of the interactive features of the software to involve pupils. In another group pupils worked capably and diligently with minimal supervision.
- Some good differentiation was observed in the science lessons seen where activities were carefully matched to the pupils' abilities. A teaching assistant provided extra support to those who needed it.
- Science lessons include excellent opportunities for pupils to develop independent learning skills, for example, carrying out an investigation which they had planned the previous day. In another example, a group of pupils played a science loop card game, very capably led by one of the pupils.
- Good use is made of investigative and experimental work.
- Pupils are encouraged to think about their own predictions and to test these.
- Some good questioning was observed where teachers encouraged pupils to give lengthy detailed answers, and asked supplementary questions to help deepen pupils' understanding.
- Good use is made of science glossaries to help pupils develop confidence in the use of scientific terminology. Pupils value these and use them in lessons.
- Individual targets are set for pupils and older pupils generally know what they are.
- Regular assessments are used to monitor progress against targets.
- There is good involvement of pupils in a variety of different activities in lessons.
- Teachers use praise well in the marking of pupils' work. However marking rarely makes direct reference to individual targets, and specific guidance on how to improve work is not consistently offered.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum in science is good.

- Good use is made of enhancement activities such as visits to broaden pupils' understanding.
- The science curriculum includes plenty of practical and experimental work and makes good use of ICT to enhance learning.

- There are good opportunities for pupils' personal development through science.

Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management of science are good.

- Day to day management of science is effective.
- Good use is made of the full range of performance data available.
- Comprehensive tracking records are maintained.
- The leadership by the science coordinator is very good. She carries out regular audits and monitors provision in science, for example through work scrutiny. Clear guidance is given to teachers.
- Useful analyses of pupils' responses to test questions are undertaken to identify areas for development, and these are acted upon appropriately.
- The school has recognised the need to improve pupils' scientific literacy and is taking appropriate steps to tackle this.
- There is a focus on the transition from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2, particularly in terms of the different terminology expected.
- There has been limited professional development in science for teachers in recent years. However the science coordinator has used her experience as a national test marker well, and shared her knowledge with other teachers.

Inclusion

The school's approach to inclusion in science is good.

- Teachers know their pupils well and plan lessons carefully to meet the full range of needs.
- Some classes are small which enables teachers to give particularly good individual attention to those most in need of it.
- Teaching assistants provide appropriate support in some lessons.
- Close attention is given to monitoring the progress of looked after children.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- continuing to develop strategies to improve pupils' scientific literacy and data interpretation skills, in order to raise the proportion of pupils achieving level 5 at the end of Key Stage 2
- making more use of individual targets and constructive guidance on how pupils can improve their work to reach higher levels
- developing further the monitoring and evaluation of science by introducing observations of science lessons.

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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Ruth James
Her Majesty's Inspector