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Mr P Enright
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Enright

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 2-3 October 2007 to look at work in science.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of science, the visit had a particular focus on the impact of national strategies on teaching and learning 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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are outstanding.

- The students at this school attain high standards and make very good progress in science.
- Key Stage 3 test results have improved in 2007 and remain above national averages.
- The school has two routes to Key Stage 4 science qualifications; the GCSE dual award in science and a GNVQ Intermediate. Both show high achievement. In 2007 80% of the students were awarded A*- C grades in the GCSE and there was 100% award in the GNVQ.
- Students' progress, as calculated by contextual value added (CVA) scores, has been high and indicates that students make better progress than might be predicted by their prior attainment.

- A and AS level attainment is also high. Students taking A level sciences attained record average points scores for the school in 2007. Pass rates were 100% in biology, chemistry and physics. Value added calculations show that students achieve A level grades at or above those predicted from their GCSE attainments.
- The standard of students' work in lessons and in files and exercise books is good. They are set challenging tasks and targets and clearly rise to the challenge.
- Students work hard in lessons and make confident responses to direct questions. They enjoy their work and achieve high standards.

Quality of teaching and learning of subject/aspect

Teaching and learning are good.

- Lessons are well planned and teachers make very effective use of ICT. Lesson objectives are clear and relevant to the programme of study and shared with the students. Science activities are carefully planned to meet the range of needs of the students.
- Practical work is interesting and carried out safely. Students' behaviour is very good and there is an ethos and hard work and enjoyment in science.
- In a minority of lessons the teachers talked for too long and the students were too passive. In addition the students felt that they used ICT less often in science than in other lessons.
- Students' work is thoroughly marked and regularly checked. Most of the work scrutinised contained helpful comments. Assessment and monitoring is well developed and science teachers collaborate well to complete tracking spreadsheets. Assessment is accurate and awarding body moderators comments are positive. Assessment for learning is still under development.

Quality of the curriculum

The science curriculum is good.

- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is broad and balanced and meets the needs of the students. Mixed ability sets are used and achievements and progress measures show that these are successful.
- The two routes through Key Stage 4 (GCSE double award and GNVQ) successfully meet the needs of the students. The GNVQ was originally developed for students at the C/D grade boundary; but the school now more successfully targets students at the D/E grade boundary for this programme.
- Apart from a small group of students who take a single GCSE award along with some basic skills programmes, the double science GCSE meets the needs of the rest of the Key Stage 4 cohort.
- In the sixth form the science curriculum is narrow and three A levels, biology, chemistry and physics are offered.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good.

- The team of science teachers and technicians is well led and collaborate well as a team.
- Detailed schemes of work have been reviewed and revised recently; a task that involved considerable team work and delegation. The schemes are thorough toolkits for the science team.
- The science team's self assessment document is thorough, evaluative and accurate. It contains clear judgements backed up by evidence and is an example of good practice.
- Lesson observations and monitoring are regularly carried out and senior managers have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of science teaching.
- Quality assurance in the science department is rigorous.
- Progression from Key Stage 4 to the sixth form is good and students feel well supported in the transition process. Advice is good and those who go on the further education in other colleges get impartial advice and guidance.
- The school has developed good links with feeder primary schools and younger students report that transition arrangements are good.

Inclusion

Inclusion is good.

- The curriculum at Key Stage 4 successfully offers a number of routes that meet the broad range of students' ability.
- Mixed ability sets in Key Stage 3 promote inclusion and are in line with the Catholic ethos of the school.
- Support for students with learning disabilities and difficulties is well organised and effective.
- The science accommodation is fully compliant with the requirements of three students with physical disabilities are currently studying the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) and science at the school.
- The school collaborates with other local catholic schools so that there is access to a wide range of subject options in the sixth form.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- furthering development of ICT for students' use in lessons
- broadening the range of science opportunities in the sixth form
- continuing to develop assessment for learning.

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/Local Learning and Skills Council and will be published on the

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

Yours sincerely

Alex Falconer
Her Majesty's Inspector