Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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

Ofsted
raising standards
improving lives

09 March 2008

Mr S Mason
Headteacher
The Honywood Community Science School
Westfield Drive
Coggeshall
Colchester
Essex
CO6 1PZ

Dear Mr Mason

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 04 - 05 March 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 to track the impact of recent initiatives and to investigate the need for future developments.

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 learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Standards are well above national average and achievement is outstanding at Key Stages 3 and 4.

- Attainment in science at Key Stage 3 has been above national average and has improved over the past 5 years. Around one in three students achieved the highest level possible in science national tests in 2007. Progress has also been well above national average for similar schools.
- Pass rates for GCSE science at A*-C have also improved over the past 5 years and in 2007 were well above national average. Students make

progress in science at Key Stage 4 above that predicted from their prior attainment.
- Boys and girls made very similar progress as did other groups such as those with special educational needs.
- The standard of work in science lessons is very good especially during practical work and investigations.
- Progression to full time education post 16 is very high and the proportion going on to study sciences at AS and A Level is good.

Quality of teaching and learning of science

Teaching and learning in science are good.

- Most teaching is good or better. However, one inadequate lesson was observed.
- Science teachers are confident specialists who are well prepared for their lessons and share the learning objectives with the students.
- Most science lessons are characterised by imaginative and engaging starter activities and effective plenary sessions. The best lessons have an appropriate mix of activities to keep up interest and to illustrate key ideas and concepts. Practical work is well planned and safely carried out.
- The pace of learning is good and students collaborate well with other in group work to further their understanding.
- In a minority of lessons planning was not thought through and students were not engaged or entirely sure what they should be doing.
- Students' behaviour in lessons is good and teachers plan effectively, and use teaching assistants appropriately to support those whose progress or behaviour is less secure.
- Standards are good and students know that they are expected to work hard. This is reflected in both the examination successes they achieve and in the positive attitudes they show in science lessons.
- Assessment is thorough and the tracking of students' progress is well organised. Teachers are effective in recording what the students can do and in communicating to them what they should know and how to improve. However, the marking in exercise books is less secure and diagnostic marking has yet to be fully developed.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum in science is outstanding.

- The Key Stage 3 science curriculum is well balanced and successfully prepares the students for life as citizens as well as preparing them for Key Stage 4.
- At GCSE, triple science meets the needs of the most able students and success rates are high. GCSE core and additional science is taken by the majority of students and in addition applied science is available for those who are suited to a more vocationally focused programme. Entry level and core single science are used to meet the needs of the least able.

- Following some research in the school, single gender sets for science in year 8 have been set up. It is too early to judge the outcomes from this interesting initiative.
- The informal curriculum and enrichment activities are key strengths of the science provision. Students have access to a wide variety of relevant and interesting after school activities and trips. Participation rates in these activities are high and the students appreciate and enjoy them.

Leadership and management in science

Leadership and management are outstanding.

- The science team is very well led and the head of department and the advanced skills teacher set high standards. They are well organised and give effective support to all their colleagues.
- The day to day running of the programmes is good and specialist resources are well used to support learning. Teachers and teaching assistants are well qualified.
- Standards are high and the Key Stage 3 test results have improved year on year for the past 5 years. Attainment at Key Stage 4 has also improved and students continue to achieve good successes at GCSE. Teaching has also improved, although some less good teaching and learning remains.
- Observation of teaching and learning is established and is planned to bring about further improvements when fully aligned with the school's evaluation methodology.
- The science team work well together and show enthusiasm for improvement and development. Their self evaluation is rigorous and self accurate.
- There are high levels of commitment from the science staff who run clubs, take part in community outreach and help develop the specialism.
- Collaboration with local primary schools is very well organised. Teachers in primary school have sought and benefited from the expertise of the science team. A wide range of enrichment activities for local primary school children, which are very well attended, regularly take place.
- Community outreach is outstanding. It has been thoughtfully organised and is an integral part of the school's science specialist status. Local people come to the school to enjoy weekend science events and open day activities. Transition from primary schools is very effectively enhanced by these activities.

Inclusion

Inclusion is good.

- The science curriculum is fully accessible by students of all abilities. No group of students, by gender, ethnicity or ability performs significantly less well than any other.

- Single gender sets in Year 8 have been established in order to improve the performance of boys.
- Science enrichment activities are used by pastoral staff to help begin to re-engage some students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- bringing about improvement in the lessons judged satisfactory or less than satisfactory
- improving the consistency of diagnostically marked work
- making sure that lesson observation judgements are consistently analysed.

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

Alex Falconer
Her Majesty's Inspector