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Mrs L Ellis
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Dear Mrs Ellis

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 4-5 December 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 ten lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- At key Stage 3 students' achievements in national tests have improved over the past three years. In 2004/05 just over a third achieved level 5 or better in science. However in 2006/07 over half achieved level 5 or better and around 20% achieved level 6. When compared to other state maintained schools, standards at Key Stage 3 remain below national average.
- The proportion of students gaining A* to C grades (or equivalent) in GCSE sciences has improved form around a third in 2004/05 to nearly two thirds in 2006/07. Again, however, the standards remain below national averages.

- Students come to the school with below average Key Stage 2 attainments and school records show that their reading ages are below chronological ages. The progress students make in both key stages is good and CVA scores have been consistently high over the past three years.
- Currently the standard of students' work in science is satisfactory. Their oral, practical and group skills are better developed than their written skills.

Quality of teaching and learning of science

Teaching and learning are satisfactory with some good features.

- The majority of lessons observed were satisfactory and no unsatisfactory teaching and learning was observed.
- In the main the aims of the lessons were clear and shared with the students. The teachers made good use of question and answer and starter activities were also well used. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) was used effectively to illustrate scientific concepts and to make links with the world outside the classroom.
- In a minority of lessons the activities at the end were rushed and the lesson plans were not completed. In other lessons a small number of students were disengaged, chatty and did not work hard enough.
- Students' progress is well tracked in science and records are well kept. Students are reasonably clear as to the progress they are making with their targets. However marking is inconsistent.
- Transition is good and well organised. A thorough programme of activities and visits is in place for Year 6 students and their parents.
- The transition work is well reviewed and students' views are recorded and analysed.
- Year 10 and 11 students have access to relevant advice and guidance concerning their Post 16 options and the school liaises with a wide range of agencies to ensure that Key Stage 4 students are aware of the opportunities available to them.

Quality of the curriculum

The science curriculum is good and meets the needs of the students.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the needs of the students. The science team is currently reviewing this curriculum and has already supplemented the Eureka scheme with tests and assessments that focus more effectively on SATs.
- The Key Stage 4 curriculum has changed considerably over the past three years but has kept a broadly vocational approach which is successful in engaging the interests of the students. Banding of classes is reasonably successful in science and the least able are able to access units of the 360 course that meet their needs and some students take the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness as an award for their science studies.
- The rural dimension to the science curriculum is highly successful and is a key strength of the science team. Students in Year 7 receive one

science lesson a week either on the school farm or in the “outdoor classroom”.
- The school farm, the young farmers club, the fishing club and the Prince’s Trust group all represent ways in which students can access worthwhile activities that are linked to the schools rural dimension.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory with some good features.

- The science self assessment is a sensible and evaluative document that contains a useful analysis of students’ achievements and some thoughtful judgements. The science development plan is satisfactory but does not address all the issues identified in the self assessment.
- Day to day running of the science provision is sound. Planning and assessments are in place and timetabling is clear.
- Teachers are well qualified and all have relevant teaching qualifications. Professional development is well organised and integrated into the school performance management system.
- Teaching assistants are well used in the school to cover for staff absence. In science this means that the students get a measure of continuity when teachers are absent or away on training.

Inclusion

Inclusion is good and is a key strength of the school.

- Arrangements for the welfare and re-engagement of students are very good. Teachers, teaching assistants, the SENCO and the behaviour lead professional are effectively used to support students who are in danger of falling behind.
- In addition, the rural dimension and a wide range of science enrichment activities help the least able and some disengaged students to grow in self esteem and to find success.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising students’ standards in science at Key Stages 3 and 4
- improving the proportion of good and better teaching in science lessons
- ensuring that the science development plan addresses all the weaknesses identified in the self assessment report.

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