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Mrs G Labrum
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Labrum

Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: science

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 2 and 3 July 2012 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 seven lessons, including joint observations with school leaders.

The overall effectiveness of science is satisfactory.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is satisfactory.

- Students enter the school with prior attainment which is broadly average. Students make satisfactory progress in science, and attainment at the end of Key Stages 4 and 5 is in line national averages. Disabled students and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.
- Arrangements for setting challenging targets and monitoring students' progress in science have been strengthened in line with whole-school procedures. School records indicate that attainment and progress at both Key Stages 4 and 5 are now rapidly improving.
- Students enjoy science lessons and demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. In some lessons observed, students worked independently and demonstrated resilience when tackling challenging tasks. However, in a

number of lessons opportunities were missed to allow students to work independently and the teacher fully determined the pace of learning.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in science is satisfactory.

- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan imaginative activities based on real-life situations which engage students in their learning. In the best lessons observed, students were given opportunities to work independently to carry out practical investigations and solve problems. For example, in a GCSE physics lesson students worked collaboratively to devise experiments to collect data and carry out stepped calculations independently to investigate power and work done.
- On some occasions opportunities were missed to allow students to work independently and lead their own learning. Questioning did not always encourage students to give extended answers and therefore fully check and clarify understanding and further extend learning. On a few occasions, the teacher's expectations of students were not sufficiently high.
- Arrangements for marking and assessment are good, especially in Key Stage 5 where students and teachers now have a good awareness of the precise knowledge and skills that need to be developed to improve achievement. Students' written work in science is well presented and of very good quality, although on some occasions more explicit feedback on how it could be improved would be helpful.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in science is good.

- The science curriculum is broad and balanced, with an appropriate mix of academic and vocational courses in Key Stage 4. It is regularly reviewed to ensure that it continues to meet students' needs. Students enter the school in Year 9, and good arrangements are in place to support transition and ensure that students are directed towards the most appropriate GCSE or vocational courses. Recent changes to advice and guidance for students progressing to the sixth form mean that they are very well informed about Key Stage 5 courses and this is having a positive impact on the uptake of A-level sciences.
- The science department provides a well-resourced, bright and safe environment for learning.
- The school has developed links with local schools and universities to provide enrichment opportunities and promote science. Discussions with students indicate that they would welcome more such activities to support their learning in science and the department plans to enhance its extra-curricular programme in the future.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

The effectiveness of leadership and management in science is good.

- The head of department demonstrates great enthusiasm for science and provides a good role model for staff and students. Senior leaders are very supportive of science and are determined to ensure that both achievement and the quality of teaching continue to improve.
- Leaders in science have a very accurate view of the department's strengths and areas for development. Students' progress is systematically monitored to identify areas of underperformance and effective intervention is put in place. Teachers are well supported by in-house professional development, including an effective coaching programme. Links with partner schools and external agencies are being developed to further support science teaching.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- further increasing the proportion of good and outstanding teaching in the science department by:
  - even better use of assessment information to plan activities which are differentiated to meet the needs of all students
  - increasing the frequency of planned opportunities for students to work independently
- further developing the extra-curricular programme of activities for science to enthuse students about science and promote its further study.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop science in the school.

As 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

John Meinke
Additional Inspector