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Mr C Hunt
Principal
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Dear Mr Hunt

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 29 and 30 May 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 nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science is good.

Achievement in science

Achievement in science is good.

- Achievement has risen sharply over the last three years. Students arrive at the school with average attainment in science. They make good progress and leave with GCSE results that are above the national average.
- In 2011, about 60% of students studied three separate sciences at GCSE. Of these students over a quarter obtained A* or A grades. Evidence from examination results already published and the school's own tracking data indicate that students are likely to do at least as well, if not better in 2012.
- Students who are supported through school action and those who are known to be eligible for free school meals achieve as well as their peers.
- Students enjoy science and take an active interest in lessons. They work very cooperatively together in groups and older students take

responsibility for their learning. Practical work is carried out calmly and sensibly.

Quality of teaching in science

The quality of teaching in science is good.

- In lessons, students are provided with a wide range of activities which sustains their interest. Students often work in groups and discuss their learning together. Teachers model the use of key vocabulary which helps students to express themselves in appropriate scientific language. Students say that teachers are 'good explainers'.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used very effectively to help explain the principles behind scientific concepts, and to generate interest.
- Regular assessment means that students know their targets and how well they are doing. It also allows teachers to identify and remedy underachievement.
- Although students are provided with good-quality oral feedback about their work in lessons, marking in exercise books, especially at Key Stage 3, is not sufficiently regular or helpful. As a result, students are not consistently provided with guidance about what they need to do to improve. Students are not given dedicated time to correct or improve their work.
- Teachers are provided with good-quality information about the needs and strategies which will help students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This information is not always used effectively in lessons to support learning.
- A team of well-trained science technicians support teaching and health and safety procedures in the department very effectively.

Quality of the curriculum in science

The quality of the curriculum in science is good.

- The whole staff team is involved in creating schemes of work. These provide regular opportunities to develop skills for scientific investigation and the use of ICT. Teachers share resources and have the autonomy to adapt materials to suit students' needs.
- The Key Stage 4 course now runs over three years. A high proportion of students study three separate sciences at GCSE. Other students who study BTEC applied science say that this option fulfils their needs well.
- Students enjoy science and over 40% of students leaving Year 11 go on to do post-16 science-based courses. Science days, and other activities supported through the school's science specialism, such as 'Meet the scientist' and the researcher in residence, have all generated an interest in science-based careers.

- Standards at Key Stage 3 have remained secure and students continue to study all three sciences in Year 9, with a final choice about Key Stage 4 courses at the end of the year.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in science

The effectiveness of leadership and management in science is good.

- The arrival of a new head of department three years ago led to a sharp increase in achievement in science. The new head of department, who took over at the start of this term, is an Advanced Skills Teacher, as was her predecessor. This means that the department has senior staff who model exceptional practice and provide coaching and regular professional development for other teachers.
- The head of department has a clear vision which is shared by the staff team. Strengths and weaknesses are well understood and planning focuses accurately on areas that need improvement.
- Expectations about the frequency and quality of marking in exercise books are neither sufficiently clear nor robustly monitored.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the quality of written feedback to students, particularly in Key Stage 3
- using the strategies available to teachers to help them support students with special educational needs and/or disabilities to ensure that provision is closely matched to individual needs.

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.

Yours sincerely

Mary Massey
Her Majesty's Inspector