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18 May 2009

Ms S Marooney
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Marooney

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 13 May 2009 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 made included: discussions with you, discussions with senior staff, observation of lessons, scrutiny of documents and scrutiny of pupils' work.

Features of good practice observed

- Students make good progress throughout Key Stages 3 and 4. Standards in science are improving and are above county and national averages.
- Students enjoy good teaching and appreciate the enthusiasm and knowledge of their teachers. As one said 'they enjoy teaching us so we enjoy learning'.
- Good use is made of non specialist science teachers to develop students' literacy skills. This is especially useful in improving their examination techniques.
- Teachers make the objectives of the lesson clear to the students and ensure they understand the level and demand of the work.
- Assessment is used well to determine and track the standards students are reaching. Information on student performance is collected carefully and analysed to identify underachievement. The use of assessment to give pupils guidance on what they need to do to improve their work is less well developed.

- The science department made a careful examination of the new courses for Key Stage 4 and introduced the GCSEs they felt best matched their students' needs and interests.
- 'How science works' has been introduced into the science curriculum. This emphasis on the practical aspects of science has promoted students' enthusiasm and engagement with science. There is scope for strengthening the focus on scientific enquiry in this area of the curriculum to make better use of practical work.
- Good leadership of science has a strong focus on matching the strengths and interests of the teachers to the most appropriate areas of the science curriculum. This has strengthened the science team and encouraged all concerned to contribute to the work of the department, for example in developing and updating new schemes of work.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- strengthening the role of scientific enquiry in the 'How science works' approach to curriculum planning
- bringing consistency to marking pupils' work across the science subjects, such that pupils receive feedback of the same quality.

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

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Christine Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector