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Mr A J Driver
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Driver

Ofsted 2006-07 survey inspection programme – science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 08 February 2007 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. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with three staff and two groups of pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the subject, science, was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in science are good.

- National test results in science for pupils aged 11 show recent improvement, particularly at level 4. They show that pupils' progress from age 7 to 11 is broadly average. Standards for older pupils are strong and show good progress from tests at age 11.
- Good progress is made in lessons and, in discussion, pupils have good recall of the work they have done over the last few months. Year 8 pupils have good understanding of the work they have been doing.
- Pupils are confident and relish opportunity to make a contribution to the school and wider community. They are happy at school and are keen learners.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good.

- All lessons seen were good. Progress is strong in Key Stage 3, where well planned teaching is supported by detailed marking.
- Teachers are even handed in the opportunities they provide for boys and girls.
- Schemes of work set out coverage of the programmes of study effectively.
- Assessment has good features, with yearly tests that relate to national levels.
- There is good practice in linking the tracking of pupils' progress to measures of their cognitive ability. However, some levels assigned by tests on units of work are not entirely reliable, and do not give a straight forward indication of whether an individual is improving.
- There is a good focus on writing in science, with many high quality examples on display.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum in science is good.

- Booster provision for Year 6 pupils who are working just below Level 4 is of good quality and is effective in raising performance. However, withdrawal of pupils from other lessons for this purpose is disruptive. Moreover, the booster arrangement provides preparation for national tests for only a handful of Year 6 pupils. The present timetable, with Year 6 teaching throughout the year in mixed ability groups, does not readily facilitate test preparation for upper and lower ability ranges.
- In Years 7 and 8, lessons for mixed ability groups are generally effective and have incidental differences in challenge for stronger and weaker pupils; at present, this is not specific in schemes of work or lesson plans.
- The school offers an impressive range of extra-curricular activities around school and beyond. These are greatly appreciated by pupils. They participate with vigorous enthusiasm.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of science are good.

- Science is taught by an effective team, which is well led.
- Departmental documentation (handbook, schemes of work, assessment systems) supports good practice.
- There is a proper and successful focus on literacy in science as an essential skill.
- The timetabling of preparation for national tests in Year 6 is not ideal.

Inclusion

Inclusion is good.

- The school provides well in science for all pupils across the age and ability range.
- All pupils enjoy school life.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- reviewing the timetable arrangements in Year 6 for test preparation for all pupils
- planning lessons in Key Stage 3 to cater better for higher and lower ability pupils
- considering the reliability of tests in matching marks to national curriculum levels.

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

Jim Bennetts
Her Majesty's Inspector