

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



14 May 2009

Mrs V Neale
Headteacher
Bury St Edmunds County Upper School
Beetons Way
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk
IP32 6RF

Dear Mrs Neale

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 12 and 13 May 2009 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 transition within and between phases, the range of learning experiences provided; the status and use of scientific enquiry and how science works.

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 you and the science subject leader, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of 8 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Standards overall are significantly above the national average. Achievement is outstanding.

- The school has been successful in reaching and maintaining high standards and making sure that overall students make outstanding progress. The combination of outstanding teaching and very good attitudes to learning is promoting these achievements.
- Measurements of progress of students from the end of Key Stage 2 to the end of Key Stage 4 show it to have been significantly above similar schools for the three years 2006-2008.

- Progress is good across all key stages with national measures showing it to be significantly above the average. All groups of students are seen to be making good progress given their starting points.
- The proportion of students attaining at least two GCSE grades A*-C is nearly twenty percent above the national average.
- At A level the school has an open access policy and yet students have shown their achievement to be the highest in West Suffolk.
- Standards are seen to be high in lessons and in the work students do with the large majority of work being both complete and well presented.
- Students participate in lessons readily and work with confidence such that they are able to answer challenging questions and to raise their own questions with teachers
- The behaviour of students is exemplary and their personal development is strong with them taking on responsibilities and working very well with others.

Quality of teaching and learning of science

Teaching and learning are outstanding.

- All of the teaching seen was at least good and the large majority was outstanding.
- Teachers maintain a lively pace while being careful to check on the progress being made by students.
- Lessons are well planned and have clear strategies for differentiation. The students interviewed described how varied the lessons are and how all modes of learning are experienced by them.
- The teaching seen is characterised by very clear communication including instructions, explanations and the use of information communication technology to display information, stimulate engagement and give students experiences of scientific situations not available to them first-hand.
- Students across the age range judge teaching to be never less than good and mostly outstanding. They describe how enthusiastic their teachers are and how they are approachable and always willing to help.
- The work done in science successfully combines the development of scientific enquiry with increasing knowledge and understanding of science. Students work as scientists.
- Assessment strategies are rigorous, consistently implemented and much appreciated by students. They describe how assessment not only informs them of how well they are doing but also of what they need to do to improve.
- Students' attitude to their work is good and they show high levels of application.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum provided is outstanding.

- The students arrive in the school for Year 9. Through careful planning with collaborating middle schools students experience a science curriculum that has breadth and balance based on a continuum from their previous schools.
- Much of the science covered throughout the school is concerned with contemporary and relevant issues in contexts that students find interesting.
- The requirements of the National Curriculum are fully met and there is a good range of pathways provided at GCSE through the triple science, core, additional and applied science.
- At A level the range of courses has been increased to include biology, physics, chemistry, environmental science and applied science.
- The curriculum is significantly enriched through a wide range of activities made available to students.

Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management of science are outstanding.

- You have created a very positive climate for good management in the school. The direction given by the senior leadership team has great clarity and impacts positively on the management of science.
- There is a robust and informative assessment and target setting system that provides teachers with the data they need to use in planning teaching and evaluating progress.
- There is a very thorough approach to the analysis of data that identifies successes and areas for development.
- The outcomes of the outstanding leadership and management include the good confidence teachers show in their work and the coherent way in which the department works, for example, in sharing good practice.
- Teaching is evaluated systematically and the regular scrutiny of work contributes to the establishment of high standards of teaching across the department.
- There have been good opportunities for continuing professional development that have been relevant to the needs of individuals and the department. These have included externally provided courses alongside those provided in-house.

No significant areas for improvement in science were identified. The school's own improvement planning responds to the needs of students and national changes in rational ways.

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

Ian Richardson
Her Majesty's Inspector