Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Ms K Oldale
Vice Principal
Bradford College
Great Horton Road
Bradford
West Yorkshire
BD7 1AY

Dear Ms Oldale

Ofsted 2010–11 good practice survey inspection programme: improving science in colleges

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 15 and 16 February 2011 as part of our survey in science.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to a national report. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributors or contributing institutions but individuals and institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence base included: observation of six lessons and one tutorial; meetings with managers, teachers and students; review of students' work and relevant departmental documents.

Features of good practice

- Success rates and retention on the majority of science courses are high. Of note are the outstanding pass rates in GCSE chemistry and biology and the BTEC first certificate in applied science. In addition, pass rates are also very high on both GCE A- and AS-level applied science and on pharmacy courses.
- However, success rates in AS-level biology, chemistry and physics were below national averages in 2009/10. Managers and teachers have taken steps to address this, but it is too soon to judge the outcomes for students.
- The standard of work in science lessons and investigations is good. Students make progress at or above that predicted by their prior attainment. Progression to higher education from advanced and access

courses is also good. The science department has well-established and productive links with Bradford University.

- Teaching and learning in lessons are good with some outstanding features. Teachers are well qualified and plan their lessons to include a good variety of activities for the students. Practical investigations are carried out safely and the students report that they find them interesting and challenging.
- In the best lessons, teachers initiate productive discussions, leaving time for students to explain their ideas and developing understanding. However, in a minority of lessons, directed questions were not always used effectively to allow all students to contribute.
- The range of courses is wide and clearly meets the students' needs. Alongside entry level science provision, the college offers part-time programmes for local pupils who are excluded from school and for those attending pupil referral units.
- The good range of intermediate courses includes GCSE, pre-access to higher education and vocational programmes. At advanced level, students can take A and AS levels in biology, chemistry, physics and applied science along with AS science in society and access to higher education.
- The college has a tradition of employer responsive courses and a large number of students take vocational courses, training to become pharmacy technicians or dispensing opticians.
- Enrichment activities, including trips, fieldwork and visiting speakers, are well organised. Students also benefit from visits and activities aimed specifically at inspiring them to apply to higher education.
- Advice, guidance and support are good. Initial assessment is thorough and students are well supported with additional learning support. Managers have recently put in place early identification of those students on AS programmes who are in danger of underperforming. It is too early to judge the outcomes of these activities.
- The sciences get strong and sympathetic leadership from senior managers and are well led and managed. Teachers and managers have a good understanding of the backgrounds of the students, many of whom have had unsatisfactory experiences of science education in the recent past.
- Staff morale is high and teachers benefit from relevant continuing professional development, especially the vocational staff. Self-assessment is good and data are well used to inform evaluations and judgements.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- continuing to support students taking AS in biology, chemistry and physics so that they replicate the same high success rates of other science students and make sure that they progress, as appropriate, to A level
- continuing to foster teachers' understanding of the need for directed questions and the full participation of all students in discussions.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop science provision.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to the relevant funding bodies and will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

Alex Falconer
Her Majesty's Inspector