

EMMANUEL COLLEGE



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23 April 2002

Mr Mike Tomlinson CBE
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
LONDON
WC2B 6SE

Dear Mr Tomlinson

THE TEACHING OF SCIENCE AT EMMANUEL COLLEGE

Thank you for your letter about the recent press coverage in relation to the teaching of science at Emmanuel. I am obviously pleased that you are satisfied with the quality of education at the college and we were all very encouraged by your Inspectors' Report and the subsequent mention in your Annual Report. I am delighted, therefore, to be able to clarify the situation in relation to our science teaching.

You will obviously know that, as a City Technology College, Emmanuel is not obliged to follow the Programmes of Study laid down in the National Curriculum documents although we do have to teach the core and foundation subjects therein. We are therefore happy to assure you that we do not breach any of the legal requirements upon us in relation to the curriculum. Nevertheless, we both realise that much focus has been placed upon the Programme of Study in Science which demands that maintained state schools must teach:

- a how scientific controversies can arise from different ways of interpreting empirical evidence [for example, Darwin's theory of evolution];
- b ways in which scientific work may be affected by the contexts in which it takes place [for example, social, historical, moral, spiritual], and how these contexts may affect whether or not ideas are accepted;
- c to consider the power and limitations of science in addressing industrial, social and environmental questions, including the kinds of questions science can and cannot answer, uncertainties in scientific knowledge, and the ethical issues involved.



Principal: Nigel McQuoid BA(Hons)

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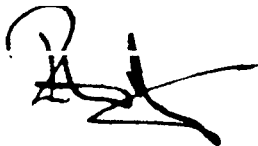
Although not obliged to cover any of these topics, at Emmanuel we **choose** to cover all these areas together with details on fossil records, 'Big Bang' theory and both variation and natural selection because we believe that it is good practice to teach these views and perspectives. It also enables us to demonstrate to our students the key differences between the empirical and the theoretical, as SC1 encourages all maintained schools to do. We would be interested to know whether OfSTED inspections of schools which are obliged to follow the National Curriculum Programmes of Study in Science are expected to assess whether or not these very points, including controversies regarding the theory of evolution, are being adequately taught as required. For your information I enclose the full papers presented in KS4 with regard to evolution and controversy.

In relation to the views and beliefs of individual members of the Emmanuel College staff, you will not be surprised to learn that we operate an educational environment which encourages freedom for students and staff to express their thoughtful and considered questions and opinions within a proper context of academic respect. Such academic freedom is a precious instrument within any institution as long as it does not conflict with the laws of the land or with the ethos of the College.

I can assure you that the debate within College surrounding the origins of life, the universe and the world as we now see it is diverse, energetic and wholly in keeping with the very best tradition of scientific observation, enquiry, analysis, experiment and theory. It is also important to note that our Science Department staff hold a wide variety of personal opinions on these matters, ranging from atheistic evolution to six-day creation (and the several points in between). These diverse views are welcome to be explored within the proper context of science lessons but, given that it is our policy to encourage such freedom and diversity, the views of none of our staff are in conflict with our expectations and we are happy that they are expressed temperately and properly by all staff in all Departments.

I trust that this answers your questions and I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Vardy', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

SIR PETER VARDY
(Chairman)

Enc: