

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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Mr J Tomsett
Headteacher
Huntington School
Huntington Road
Huntington
York
YO32 9WT

Dear Mr Tomsett

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 17 and 18 February 2011 to look at work in mathematics.

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 included: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of six lessons with short visits to eight more.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Attainment is above average. Although recent results at GCSE have not been consistently above average, results from recent modular examinations, extensive internal assessment data and evidence from students' books confirm that current standards are above average.
- Students achieve well during their time in the school. Data analysis and evidence from lessons support the view that current students are making good progress; they make clear gains in their understanding of key ideas and their ability to tackle more complex problems.
- More able students make particularly good progress. For example, in 2010 84% of the more able students made the expected three levels of progress, compared with an average of 74% for similar students

nationally. Although in 2010, low ability girls made less progress than other groups, there is no consistent pattern of underachievement by any group.

- In the sixth form, attainment at A level is above average and students' achievement is good.
- Most students show good attitudes to learning. They show an interest in their work and are keen to improve.

Quality of teaching in mathematics

The quality of teaching in mathematics is good.

- Teachers plan lessons that are structured well to build on prior knowledge, so that understanding builds steadily as new ideas are introduced. A variety of interesting tasks helps students to maintain their interest and promotes enjoyment of the subject.
- Most teaching has a suitable emphasis on developing students' understanding of key concepts, rather than simply practising techniques. However, on occasions, teachers introduce a result without giving sufficient justification or proof and this has a negative impact on the confidence of some students.
- While teachers make good and extensive use of information and communication technology to present and illustrate mathematical ideas, students have only limited opportunities to use it themselves in lessons.
- The use of assessment is good overall and students are beginning to take a more active role in assessing their own progress. Teachers' comments in exercise books help students to understand where they have gone wrong and how they can improve. However, on some occasions, teachers miss opportunities to develop students' literacy skills, for example in not responding to students' misspelling of key mathematical vocabulary.

Quality of the curriculum in mathematics

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is good.

- The curriculum meets students' needs well. Almost all students enter the GCSE examination in Year 11, and in 2010, all those who entered gained certification at or above grade G.
- The scheme of work is well organised and contains useful links to additional resources. The range of topics and activities places suitable emphasis on developing students' skills in using and applying mathematics.
- The department makes extensive provision for preparing students for their modular GCSE examinations, including reorganising teaching groups to accommodate the needs of those students due to re-sit modules. As a result, a significant proportion of students in Years 10 and 11 improve their grades.

- Although there is no written record of agreed approaches, common approaches to teaching particular topics, such as how to solve linear equations, are helping to strengthen the progression in students' learning.
- Sixth-form students benefit from the opportunity to study A-level mathematics and further mathematics. Increasing numbers continue their study of mathematics as part of the International Baccalaureate.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics

Leadership and management in mathematics are good.

- The school has a track record of improving provision, including taking decisive action and focusing resources effectively. For example, additional resources allocated to reduce underachievement of low ability girls have had a measurable impact. A larger proportion of students are gaining GCSE passes at the highest A* grade and there is a long-term trend of improved results at A level.
- The proportion of students opting to continue their study of mathematics in the sixth form has been maintained at approximately 25%, which is higher than is typical.
- Leaders and managers evaluate carefully the impact of initiatives and this helps with developing provision quickly and efficiently. However, long-term improvement planning needs to focus more on outcomes and how progress towards outcomes can be measured.
- Leaders and managers demonstrate a clear focus on improvement. A well-managed approach to curriculum development, involving contributions from teachers across the department, is helping to create additional resources and share good practice.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving teaching and learning through:
 - ensuring that mathematical results are justified or proved, as appropriate
 - paying more attention to developing students' literacy skills
- ensuring that long-term planning includes clear opportunities to review progress towards explicitly quantified targets.

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

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Paul Chambers
Her Majesty's Inspector