

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



22 March 2011

Mrs A Brook  
Headteacher  
St Benedict's Catholic High School  
Red Lonning  
Hensingham  
Whitehaven  
CA28 8UG

Dear Mrs Brook

### **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 9 and 10 March 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 eight lessons and short visits to seven other lessons or support sessions.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is satisfactory.

#### **Achievement in mathematics**

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Attainment is broadly average. For example, in 2010, the proportion of students gaining GCSE mathematics at grades A\* to C was 62%, compared with a national average of 64%.
- Students' achievement is satisfactory given their starting points, with progress generally in line with national averages. Evidence gathered during the inspection confirms that current students make satisfactory progress in lessons and during their time in school.
- There is no consistent pattern of different progress by different groups of students.

- In the sixth form, attainment in A-level examinations is broadly average. After some underachievement in recent years, the school's data indicate that current students are making satisfactory progress.
- Most students have positive attitudes to work; they behave well and are keen to make progress.

### **Quality of teaching in mathematics**

The quality of teaching in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Teaching has an appropriate focus on developing students' conceptual understanding and justifying mathematical results and techniques. Teachers form good working relationships with students, which contribute to their positive attitudes and willingness to tackle challenging problems.
- In the more successful lessons, such as when teachers use sorting and matching activities, students benefit from discussing their understanding in groups and enjoy their learning. While teachers make satisfactory use of information and communication technology (ICT) to present mathematical ideas, opportunities for students to use ICT in class to support their learning are limited.
- Although there is some variation between different classes, students generally benefit from opportunities to assess their work and reflect on what they have learnt. The use of peer-assessment to support learning is less well developed. In class, teachers respond well to requests for help but sometimes miss opportunities to assess students' progress systematically. On other occasions, they do not look closely enough at students' written work and so miss errors and inaccuracies.
- Students know their target grades and how well they are doing but not all are clear on what they need to work on to improve.

### **Quality of the curriculum in mathematics**

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is satisfactory.

- The curriculum caters for the range of students' needs and interests and promotes satisfactory progress in their learning. All students study for the GCSE examination and, in 2010, almost all gained a grade G or above. Year 11 students also gain certification from the Adult Literacy and Numeracy tests at either level 1 or level 2. A flexible entry policy for GCSE examinations is helping the small number of students at risk of becoming disaffected to achieve success.
- The scheme of work is comprehensive and supported by a good range of resources that support learning effectively. A new scheme in Key Stage 3 is not yet fully implemented but has increased the opportunities for students to develop skills in using and applying mathematics. Processes for monitoring the development of these skills are at an early stage.
- The good sixth-form curriculum enables students to study A-level mathematics and further mathematics. In Year 12, students are able to

study for an AS in the Use of Mathematics or study GCSE work to improve the grade obtained in Year 11.

- A combination of mentoring, small-group tuition and additional lessons is helping to motivate the students involved and accelerate their progress. Students value the opportunity to use ICT resources to support their learning at home. They also find after-school revision sessions useful but relatively low attendance limits their effectiveness.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics**

Leadership and management in mathematics are satisfactory.

- Leaders and managers are successfully minimising the impact of recent staffing difficulties and changes in subject leadership. A sharper use of data is helping to identify more quickly where intervention may be needed.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and improvement planning has appropriate areas of focus. Sharper success criteria would make it easier to review progress towards targets.
- Recent examination results have fluctuated rather than risen consistently. Evidence from the inspection supports the school's view that changes in provision and improved teaching are beginning to have a positive impact on students' progress. However, the impact on external examination results has been limited.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- increasing students' progress, including in the sixth form, so that it consistently meets or exceeds national averages
- improving teaching and learning through:
  - ensuring that all students know where to focus their work to improve
  - checking students' written work carefully so that errors are remedied more quickly.

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**