

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



13 October 2011

Mr B Conboy
Headteacher
Our Lady's Catholic College
Morecambe Road
Lancaster
Lancashire
LA1 2RX

Dear Mr Conboy

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 5 and 6 October 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; observation of five lessons and shorter visits to nine others.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is satisfactory.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Attainment is average. For example, in 2010, 66% of students gained a GCSE grade A* to C, compared with the national average of 64%. This was a clear increase on the 2009 results, when 51% attained the same measure. The unvalidated 2011 results are similar to those in 2010 and the school's records indicate that current students can at least maintain these standards. Girls' attainment is slightly higher than boys', particularly at the highest grades.
- Students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make progress in line with expectations, in lessons and over their time in the school. Recent data show that the proportion of students making the expected three levels of progress is close to the national average.

- Most students have positive attitudes and are keen to make progress. They work well in pairs and groups, offering good support to the learning of others. Students tackle number work with confidence. They are less successful when algebraic problems are presented in an unfamiliar form.
- In the sixth form, students' achievement is outstanding. Attainment is generally above average, and students make considerably more progress than similar students in other sixth forms. This is because students studying A-level courses benefit from consistently good teaching and support, and they develop and maintain a strong work ethic.

Quality of teaching in mathematics

The quality of teaching in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Teachers plan their lessons taking full account of the progression of skills students need to attain the lesson objectives. They use questioning well to challenge students' thinking and encourage students to explain their reasoning wherever possible. They use mini-whiteboards effectively to monitor learning and involve students in the lesson.
- Sixth-form students benefit from opportunities to consolidate their learning using summaries of the work recently covered.
- While many teaching approaches focus on developing students' conceptual understanding, some teaching has too much focus on helping students to master skills without developing deep or transferable learning.
- Teachers' in-class assessment makes good use of techniques for gauging the progress of the group as a whole. However, it is not always sufficiently systematic or rigorous, so that opportunities to identify individuals who are falling behind or misunderstanding the work are missed.

Quality of the curriculum in mathematics

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is satisfactory.

- The curriculum meets students' needs. Almost all students finish Year 11 with a GCSE pass at grades A* to G. In the sixth form, students following the A-level course have an opportunity to choose between statistics and mechanics in Year 13. Further mathematics is available on a reduced timetable. The sixth-form timetable caters suitably for students wishing to improve their GCSE grade through resitting the examination in Year 12.
- The schemes of work in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form follow closely the specifications of the awarding bodies. In Key Stage 3, the scheme is based around the chapters of different textbooks, with additional references to 'rich tasks' and enrichment materials. Currently this scheme takes insufficient account of changes made to the National Curriculum in 2007. Teachers would benefit from additional guidance on teaching materials and possible approaches.
- Leaders and managers are aware of the need to develop the virtual learning environment (VLE) further so that students have more opportunities to extend and consolidate their learning at home.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics

The effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics is good.

- The strong improvements evident in the 2010 GCSE results have been consolidated. The department is meeting more of its demanding targets. Students' achievement in the sixth form has been maintained at a high level.
- Self-evaluation is accurate. Improvement planning is wide-ranging and includes appropriate areas of focus, although some success criteria lack precision. Current management systems, together with evidence from recent outcomes, demonstrate good capacity to improve.
- Leaders and managers identified previous weaknesses in the department's work and acted vigorously and decisively, including making full use of external support, to effect improvements. Examination results did not drop during a time of considerable staffing turbulence. Several changes in staffing have taken place recently and, although it is too soon to evaluate the full impact of these changes, students support the view of senior leaders that the work of the department is stronger than in recent years.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing teaching further through
 - ensuring that teachers, both individually and as a department, focus consistently on developing conceptual understanding
 - using in-class assessment more systematically
- improving progression in students' learning through
 - developing the Key Stage 3 scheme of work to reflect more fully the changes to the National Curriculum
 - providing more guidance on recommended materials and teaching approaches.

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