

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6855
www.ofsted.gov.uk



16 October 2006

Miss M Lewis
Headteacher
Mellow Lane School
Hewens Road
Hayes
Middlesex
UB4 8JP

Dear Miss Lewis

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Evaluation of the impact of the Primary and Secondary National Strategies

I am grateful for the hospitality and co-operation of you and your staff during my visit with Kekshan Salaria HMI on 27-28 September to look at work in the Secondary National Strategy (SNS).

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the SNS, the visit had a particular focus on the quality of continuity and progression for pupils on entry to secondary school.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work, observation of ten lessons and interviews with staff, pupils and your chair of governors. The inspection took place at a time when five new members of staff had recently joined, including two newly qualified teachers in their fourth week of teaching and a short term maternity cover on her first day.

The overall effectiveness and impact of the SNS in mathematics is unsatisfactory

There are some examples of SNS influence, but the Strategy is not being used to drive forward improvements in teaching and learning in a coherent way. The prevailing teaching style does not develop good understanding and does not encourage pupils to think for themselves.

Achievement and standards

Although mathematics results have been improving and standards are broadly average, the level of achievement observed in lessons was inadequate.

- In nearly all lessons, pupils could not make good progress because their work was undemanding. Progress was unsatisfactory in nearly half the mathematics lessons observed.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in mathematics is inadequate.

- The influence of the SNS is evident in the use of learning objectives and lesson structures but the impact is superficial. Lesson starters are too teacher-focused, plenary sessions do not explore students' understanding and teachers make insufficient use of visual or practical aids for conceptual development.
- Despite the school's aim that pupils become independent thinkers, the prevailing teaching style does not develop their mathematical thinking. The attitudes and behaviour of most students were good but where teachers' expectations were too low the pupils misbehaved or lost concentration.
- There is an effective system for assessing students' work by end of unit tests, but routine marking and questioning is not used well enough to assess understanding, identify misconceptions and support learning.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is inadequate.

- Teachers find it difficult to judge the appropriate pace and depth of mathematical coverage. The scheme of work gives little guidance on how to teach topics well and there is limited use of the SNS learning resources.
- The use of inter-active whiteboards supports teaching and increases the engagement of some pupils, but pupils rarely use ICT themselves.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management of the SNS in mathematics are inadequate.

- The monitoring and evaluation of mathematics provision has not been rigorous enough. The Strategy's audit process has not been used recently and the department has no plans to introduce a wider range of learning approaches.

- The school has rightly recognised the need for students to develop greater independence and self-reliance, but the plans for improving teaching and learning do not make it clear how this will be achieved.
- The strategy is no longer a driving force for improvement in mathematics.

The quality of transition to secondary school

Transition arrangements are satisfactory.

- Transition information is received by the school but it is unclear what use is made of it by teachers.
- The school meets with primary partners to find out about each pupil, giving extra attention to pupils with learning needs, disabilities and those who are vulnerable. Liaison with outside agencies and parents is effective. Pupils are satisfied with induction.
- The use of the SNS transition booklet is promising but still inconsistent.

The provision for inclusion

- In mathematics, schemes of work are specified for each teaching group, based on prior attainment. However, there is inconsistency in the way teachers plan to address the distinctive needs of pupils with learning difficulties or those who are not yet fluent in English.
- Pupils do not have equal access to aspects of the curriculum such as learning to solve problems, apply mathematics in context or use ICT as a mathematical tool, because they are not taught by all teachers.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- using a greater variety of active learning approaches to develop understanding and self-reliance, leaving teachers time to observe and interact with pupils to assess their understanding
- enhancing the scheme of work to ensure that all pupils are taught to use and apply mathematics and to include guidance on effective teaching approaches and the level of challenge appropriate for each module
- using monitoring and self-evaluation to inform well focused action plans which impact on students' achievement.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop your use of the Secondary National Strategy in the school.

This visit has raised serious concerns about the school's work. I will report these to the Regional Divisional Manager who will consider what action to take and may arrange an inspection of the whole school. The school's self-evaluation is inconsistent with the evidence of this visit and with the available data from examinations. Standards in all core subjects are below the national average. Despite improving trends, overall progress is well below average.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and Local Learning and Skills Council and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools