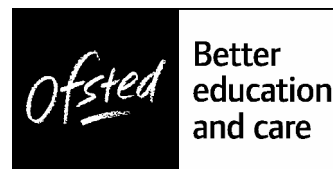


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29 September 2006

Mr John Marshall
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Marshall

Ofsted 2006-07 survey inspection programme – mathematics

Thank you very much for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 28 and 29 September 2006 to look at work in mathematics. As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on students' enjoyment and understanding of 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and the observation of eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics was judged to be good with some outstanding features.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- When students join the school, their attainment is generally above average. From this starting point, they made good progress and reached standards in 2005 that were significantly above average by the end of Years 9 and 11. Early indications from the 2006 GCSE results are that the percentage of A* to C grades was slightly lower than in 2005. However, the percentage gaining the highest grades rose considerably as a result of an additional teaching group that was set up to meet these students' specific needs.
- Preliminary results of the 2006 Year 9 tests indicate a slight drop in the proportion of students gaining level 5 and above due mainly to student absence from the tests. However, more students than before gained the highest level possible.

- In lessons, standards overall by the end of Years 9 and 11 were observed to be significantly above average with good progress made by students across all year groups.
- Students' personal development in mathematics lessons was outstanding, with most students meeting their teachers' high expectations by behaving very well and showing very appropriate attitudes to learning.

Quality of teaching and learning

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning are good.

- Teachers are hard working and enthusiastic. Their knowledge and understanding of mathematics are at least good and most design their lessons well to assist students to progress well.
- However, a small minority of students have not yet developed skills as independent learners. The regular setting of and requirement for homework to be done does go some way to improving this situation and assist the learning process.
- Generally, lessons move at a brisk, structured pace, and good progress is made. Teachers have a good rapport with students, who consequently are keen to volunteer ideas and work well together to improve their learning. ICT is generally used well by teachers and students to assist in the learning process.
- Overall the quality of assessment is good. Students' work is regularly marked and formal assessment procedures mean teachers know how well the students are doing. However, whilst students, are generally aware of their current and target grade not all are as clear on how they could improve. The use of short-term curricular targets is not a feature of students' guidance to help raise achievement.

Quality of the curriculum

Overall the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum meets students' needs well and promotes their enjoyment in mathematics. For example at GCSE level the needs of the higher ability students are well met through twilight sessions to study a module of AS level mathematics. Using and applying mathematics is strength of the curriculum for all students; however their progress in this area, in Years 7 to 9, is not monitored.
- The use of mathematics has been developed across the curriculum and links with other subjects are maintained by the department's staff to enhance students' understanding of mathematics in different contexts.
- Extra-curricular activities, including a mathematics club and mathematics challenges, enhance students' learning. However, the school has struggled to provide a suitable GCSE re-take course.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of mathematics are good overall with some outstanding features.

- Features of outstanding leadership include the empowering outreach work with a partner school whose results as a consequence have improved substantially.
- The head of department has a very good vision for improvement and, along with his deputies, has established a loyal, stable teaching team who feel well supported and work well together to raise achievement.
- Teaching is monitored; however there is scope to develop this further to ensure good practice is shared. Self-evaluation of the department accurately identifies the priorities for improvement.

Subject issue: students' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

Most students have good enjoyment of their lessons and this is especially so when they are working in groups to solve problems. However, students feel they get least enjoyment where on occasions they spend too much time working through text book questions or when the teacher talks too much. Students appreciate what they deem to be an appropriate level of challenging work. The students have a good understanding of mathematics and this has been developed through regular use of mathematical investigations. Most students are able to see the links between various areas of mathematics and understand how to draw on their previous learning to help solve problems. Very good displays in classrooms promote the students' understanding and enjoyment of their learning.

Inclusion

Inclusion is good as all students across Years 7 to 13 generally make good progress. The progress and development of individual students is tracked and decisive action is taken as a result of any perceived under-achievement. Students generally relate very well to each other, respect staff, and are keen to learn. They develop personal qualities securely and usually enjoy their mathematics education.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring all students are clear on how to improve to achieve their potential
- developing students' responsibility for their own independent learning
- developing the monitoring process to facilitate the sharing of good practice.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Wilson
Additional Inspector