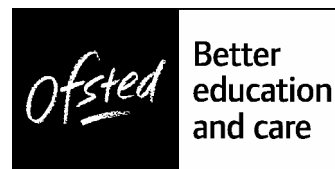


Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE
T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6644
www.ofsted.gov.uk



04 October 2006

Mrs P Conibeer
Headteacher
Walderslade Girls' School
Bradfields Avenue
Walderslade
Chatham
Kent
ME5 0LE

Dear Mrs Conibeer

Ofsted 2006-07 survey inspection programme – mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 2 and 3 October 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 pupils' 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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the subject, mathematics, was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' achievement in mathematics is satisfactory.

- There are three girls' grammar schools locally and consequently standards on entry are below average and remain so throughout the school. Results in tests at the end of Year 9 have remained fairly constant, but with a significant increase in those achieving above average levels in 2006.
- At GCSE, pupils achieve less well in mathematics than in their other subjects overall. However, almost all attain a grade, with many of those with learning difficulties and disabilities achieving well.

- In recent years, few have attained grades which enable them to study mathematics at advanced level in the sixth form.
- Most pupils are co-operative and work well. They are generally keen to learn, with good attitudes and behaviour. Relationships between pupils and teachers vary. Where pupils do not understand their work, they lose confidence, become frustrated and lose interest in lessons.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, but varies greatly.

- There is some good teaching. In these lessons, teachers use a variety of activities, address the differing needs of pupils through group and paired work, encourage discussion and constantly challenge pupils' understanding. Use of an interactive whiteboard is stimulating interest in some lessons.
- However, much teaching is uninspiring. Whilst most teachers give good help to individual pupils, the pace of lessons is often slow. Too much teaching is about learning mathematical routines, rather than developing understanding, with pupils completing repetitive exercises without thought. Plenary sessions at the end of lessons are often poor, with pupils not listening because the sessions serve no clear purpose.
- Whilst most marking is limited to ticks and crosses, with occasional praise, some is exemplary. This marking includes questions which challenge pupils' understanding and is linked closely to what goes on in lessons.
- Tests at the end of each unit of work are being introduced from this term to provide greater rigour with assessment and enable teachers to set effective, mathematical targets for pupils. Pupils indicated that current targets in reports tended to be about attitudes to learning rather than mathematics.

Quality of the curriculum

Curriculum provision is satisfactory.

- The department is developing new, improved schemes of work for pupils in Years 7 to 10. Currently, these do little more than identify pages from textbooks to be used for each part of a lesson, with no suggestions as to how to teach a topic or make use of information and communication technology (ICT).
- Pupils experience few opportunities to use and apply mathematics or to use it creatively.
- Some use of ICT, with an interactive whiteboard, is contributing to the enjoyment and understanding of some classes. The department has just purchased data projectors for all classrooms, as a first step in using ICT in all lessons.
- There is good support from a learning support assistant (LSA) for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. The school successfully supported a previous LSA to obtain a degree, and she has now rejoined the department as a teacher.
- Many targeted Year 11 pupils welcome the opportunity to attend extra lessons before and after school to improve their achievement.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management of mathematics are satisfactory and improving.

- The last few years have seen a number of changes of departmental leadership, with no overall head of department. This has impeded progress.
- The recent appointment of a head of department is welcomed by both teachers and pupils, and issues identified by the department's self-evaluation are now being addressed.

Subject issue: pupils' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

While many pupils across the ability range enjoy mathematics, many others do not. Pupils identified clearly that their enjoyment related to the quality of teaching they received, the topic being studied and, most crucially, whether they understood the work. Too often, pupils feel that they get right answers without fully understanding why. This affects their confidence. Pupils recognise good teaching that meets their individual needs, encourages collaboration and discussion, and challenges them to think. Some spoken to during the visit displayed real interest in the subject.

Inclusion

Pupils are taught in ability groups in all years, although in some classes in Years 7 to 9, grouping is based on standards in English as well as those in mathematics. Consequently, some groups contain pupils with a wide range of mathematical understanding. Results in national tests clearly show some groups achieve better than others. This is not simply related to the ability of the groups, but to the quality of mathematical experiences each group has received in their time in school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raise achievement, particularly in Years 10 and 11, with greater emphasis on developing pupils' understanding of mathematics
- ensure all teaching meets the standard of the best, providing pupils with more opportunities to collaborate and to explain their mathematics orally
- ensure new schemes of work clearly identify opportunities for using and applying mathematics and using ICT, with suggestions on appropriate teaching strategies
- Improve assessment, bringing the quality of all marking up to that of the best and setting targets which clearly establish what pupils need to do to improve

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

David M Bain
Additional Inspector