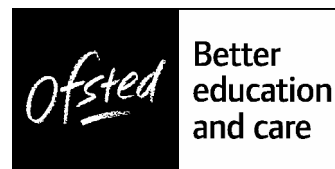


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09 October 2006

Ms J Campbell
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Dear Ms Campbell

Ofsted 2006-07 survey inspection programme – mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 5 and 6 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 managers, teachers and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of seven lessons and two intervention sessions.

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

Achievement and standards

- Students have below national average Key Stage 2 scores on entry to the school. This is particularly evident in their mathematical and literacy scores. In 2006 the Key Stage 3 average point score for mathematics was just below the national average.
- Students' scores have improved over the past three years and the trend is positive. Students' progress was significantly above the national average in 2004 and 2005 with boys and girls achieving similarly. Progress at this key stage in mathematics is therefore good.
- At the end of key stage 4 pupils' attainments were below national average; around 48% A*-C grades in 2003 and 2004, a dip in 2005 and an improvement to 48.5% in 2006. However, over the past four years the trend in attainment has

been upward and the proportion gaining A*-G grades has been around 97%. Boys and girls make at least satisfactory progress at Key Stage 4 as indicated by the CVA data.

- Currently, Key Stage 3 students are making good progress with appropriate challenge in class. Their work is regularly marked and their progress monitored.
- In Key Stage 4 some of the most able are making good progress. They undertake challenging activities, complete them well and are reasonably competent at explaining their understanding. Other groups are making at least satisfactory progress.
- Overall students in mathematics make progress significantly above the national average from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4. Some lateness to the start of lessons slows slightly the overall progress made.

Quality of teaching and learning

- Most of the teaching observed was good. Lessons are characterised by a calm working atmosphere and good behaviour. The lessons are well prepared and the teachers confident in their mathematical knowledge and their management of students' behaviour.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is well used in early morning booster sessions for Year 7 students and, overall, teachers use electronic whiteboards effectively.
- In addition they use directed questions well to probe students' understanding. However, much of the teaching was whole class and few examples of small group work were observed.
- Although teachers are confident users of ICT, little ICT was used by the students during the visit and in meetings with students it was confirmed that students use IT less frequently in mathematics lessons than in other areas of the curriculum.
- Assessment is thorough and students' progress is well tracked. In-class support for those with learning disabilities and/or difficulties is also well organised and effective.

Quality of the curriculum

- The programmes followed meet the needs of the students. Class teaching is on the whole good and the activities set to students are of an appropriate standard.
- Students' interest is engaged largely through the success they achieve from completed homework or exercises in class.
- At Key Stage 4 the timetable is arranged so that a good number of students can access vocational courses at a local Further Education college or work placements in local businesses. Since about 10% of students in Years 10 and 11 take up these vocational options, the timetable has been arranged to ensure that English, mathematics and science lessons are not missed.

Leadership and management

- The mathematics department is well managed and organised. Systems for tracking and monitoring are well established and planning is good. Staff work

hard and are well aware of the progress made by their students. Teachers are confident and proud of their students' achievements. Schemes of work are, in the main, published schemes.

- However, ICT activities for students in the classroom are insufficiently developed. While ICT is effectively used in conjunction with teaching support staff at early morning booster sessions, the team is not yet confident in its use to deepen students' mathematical understanding.

Subject issue: students' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

Most students are getting some enjoyment out of their mathematics studies through the successes they have in completing written work and seeing the teacher's marks and comments. Teachers spend time making sure that the students understand and ask probing questions. Students' responses illustrate their developing understanding and confidence.

Inclusion

A good deal of intervention work takes place across the key stages to support students and to raise standards. Considerable effort is put into supporting those in Year 7 who have low prior attainment at Key Stage 2. Early morning booster sessions are well attended and the students have access to appropriate ICT to make good progress. Support for students in Years 8, 9, 10 and 11 is also in place. Vulnerable students are accurately identified and supported.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raise attainment at GCSE to the national average
- increase use of ICT by students in lessons
- develop strategies to increase the amount of small group work and discussion.

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

Alex Falconer
Her Majesty's Inspector