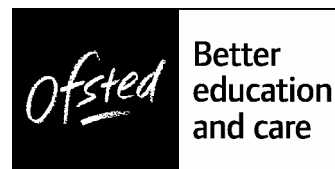


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04 November 2006

Mrs C Roberts
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Dear Mrs Roberts

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 2 and 3 November 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 five lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- From an above average standard on entry to Year 7, students made good progress with standards in 2005 significantly above average by the end of Year 9. Preliminary results of the 2006 national Year 9 tests indicate a greater proportion of students gained Level 5 and above.
- At GCSE in 2005, students attained standards which were above average. This represented broadly satisfactory progress having entered Year 7 with above average standards. Early indications from the 2006 GCSE results show the percentage of A* to C grades have increased slightly.

- More able students studying GCSE statistics in 2005 attained significantly higher-than-average standards. Initial indications of the 2006 results show the percentage of A*-C grades gained in statistics was still high but slightly less than in 2005.
- Students' personal development in mathematics lessons is good, with most students behaving well and showing appropriate attitudes to learning. They generally relate well to each other, respect staff, and develop personal qualities securely.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are satisfactory with some good features.

- A positive feature of some lessons was the good opportunities taken by the teacher to develop students' learning through the use of games and puzzles.
- Teachers are experienced; they have a good understanding of mathematics and generally have a good rapport with students. However, there is a need for teachers to plan for and develop the repertoire of teaching and learning approaches used to engage students. Also, teachers do not use assessment data when planning their lessons to ensure each student receives the appropriate level of challenge or support.
- Overall, the quality of assessment is satisfactory. Whilst students generally know their current and target level or grade, they are not clear on how to improve. Some students have not yet developed skills as independent learners. The regular setting of homework does go some way to improving this situation for most students.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- In Years 10 and 11, a modular course has recently been started to meet more fully students' needs. Higher ability students are able to study GCSE statistics, whilst those in the sixth form can study further mathematics. However, whilst schemes of work are in place they have not yet been sufficiently developed to fully support teaching.
- Using and applying mathematics is not a sufficiently developed feature of lessons, especially in Years 7 and 8 with students' progress in this area not sufficiently monitored. This does not help students develop the necessary skills.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- The head of department has established a stable cohesive teaching team and good arrangements are in place to ensure a smooth transition for primary pupils joining Year 7.

- The students benefit from regular assessments. However, whilst the resulting assessment data is recorded, systems are not sufficiently well developed, especially in Years 7 to 9, to highlight students' progress. Similarly target-setting arrangements for individual students in these years are not sufficiently rigorous.
- Some monitoring of teaching takes place but does not focus sufficiently upon learning and the progress made by students. Department self review is carried out at a basic level but does not fully evaluate the effectiveness of the department's work.

Subject issue: students' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

Overall, students say they enjoy their lessons more in the sixth form than they do in Years 7 to 11. Students cite their enjoyment of lessons to be dependent upon which teacher they have. Students get least enjoyment when too much time is spent working through text books or when teachers do not ensure their learning needs are met. 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.

Inclusion

Inclusion is satisfactory overall with some good features; for example, the good progress students make in Key Stage 3 and in Years 12 and 13. However, in Years 10 and 11, middle ability students achieved less well in 2005 than their peers and higher ability students did less well in their coursework. The monitoring of students' progress to identify and plan for their needs has not been sufficiently developed.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing teachers' use of assessment data in lesson planning to meet students' individual learning needs and in monitoring progress
- widening the repertoire of teaching and learning approaches used to engage students and meet their learning needs, especially in their use and application of mathematics
- improving the quality of feedback students receive on their work and progress in order they are clear on how to improve to achieve their potential.

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