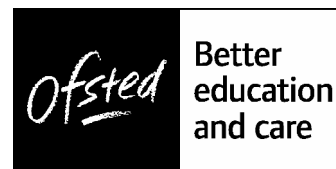


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10 November 2006

Mr John Dryden
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Dryden

Ofsted 2006-07 survey inspection programme – mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit with Angela Headon HMI on 8 and 9 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 observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Standards at the end of Year 9 and 11 in 2005 were above the national average, representing broadly satisfactory progress across Years 7 to 11. In 2006 preliminary analysis of Year 9 test results indicate the percentage of students gaining Level 5 or above has dropped. Similarly, GCSE results have fallen slightly. Standards observed in lessons were broadly average and students' progress was satisfactory.
- Students' personal development in mathematics lessons is satisfactory. Most students behave appropriately but a minority of students misbehave in lessons and show weaker attitudes to learning.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are satisfactory.

- Teachers in the mathematics department are enthusiastic and have a good rapport with students. Most have at least a sound knowledge and understanding of mathematics.
- Teachers plan their lessons using the three-part-lesson structure. However, assessment data are not used sufficiently in planning for students' needs. Recap sessions are also not used enough to consolidate learning and check on progress.
- Teachers' expectations are not always high enough, resulting in a lack of challenge for students and an inconsistent pace of learning. For some students, this leads to a passive attitude to learning.
- The inappropriate behaviour of a minority of students is not always managed effectively. Rewards and sanctions are inconsistently used to promote good behaviour and attitudes to learning.
- Students generally know their target level or grade; however, they are unsure how to improve as the quality of marking and feedback are inconsistent. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used appropriately to enhance students' learning.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory with some good features.

- It is currently being developed to meet students' needs, though the impact has yet to be realised. For example, students in lower ability groups in Key Stage 4 have the opportunity to access an on-line numeracy qualification.
- Schemes of work are in place but have not been sufficiently developed to fully guide teachers in ensuring students' learning needs are met and they do not presently include a work-related dimension.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- A cohesive, teaching and learning team has been established resulting in a good working ethos. A delegated management structure is in place. Accurate self-evaluation has led to a clear development plan.
- Students benefit from regular assessments and the resulting data is recorded. However, the data is not analysed sufficiently to provide useful information about students' progress.
- The developing use of ICT to provide a virtual learning environment is contributing to sound learning support for students.
- There is some monitoring of teaching but it lacks sufficient emphasis on students' progress and the quality of learning in lessons. There is not enough rigour in monitoring students' work to ensure they are sufficiently challenged.

- The provision for students retaking the GCSE course in the sixth form does not provide a framework within which they might achieve their potential. Improvements are needed to fully secure this provision.

Subject issue: students' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

Students say their enjoyment is best when they are involved in problem solving and mathematical games, though these are not always directly related to their learning in that lesson. Students get least enjoyment from lessons where they spend too much time working through textbook questions, when there is little challenge, or when teachers' explanations are not clear enough. Students do not like the weaker attitudes to learning of a small minority of students, which can disrupt their learning. The students are developing the ability to see links between the various areas of mathematics and are in the early stages of knowing how to draw on their previous learning to help solve problems.

Inclusion

Inclusion is satisfactory overall. Most students make broadly satisfactory progress; however, middle ability students in recent years have achieved less well at GCSE. Whilst the curriculum is being redesigned to meet students' needs, it has not yet had time to impact positively upon students' standards and achievement. The monitoring of students' progress to identify and plan for their needs is underdeveloped. Students do have equal opportunities to use ICT to further their learning but their use and application of mathematics is dependent upon which teacher they have.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising teachers' expectations and the subsequent level of challenge so that students may achieve their potential
- developing teachers' use of assessment data on individual students and improving the quality of feedback students receive on their work so that they know how to improve
- improving the management of inappropriate behaviour from a minority of students.

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