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Dear Mrs Tooley

Ofsted 2006-07 survey inspection programme: mathematics and citizenship

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and pupils, during our visit on 4 and 5 December 2006.

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 unless to highlight exceptional practice. In such circumstances the school would be contacted prior to publication to agree the exact wording. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with members of staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of lessons and extra curricular activities.

Mathematics

The overall effectiveness of mathematics was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good.

- Standards overall are in line with national averages and rising year-on-year. On entry to the school, standards are below average, but by the end of Key Stage 3, standards attained by pupils in national tests are average and at Key Stage 4 are just above average. Standards observed in lessons were generally above average and this was the case in most of the pupils' books.

- Pupils' progress in mathematics is good as they move through from Year 7 to Year 11. The proportion gaining the higher levels at GCSE is average. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress and achieve well. No groups of pupils underachieve.
- Relationships are good, as are pupils' behaviour and attitudes to mathematics. The majority of pupils enjoy mathematics. Many pupils' high levels of basic skills equip them well for their future lives.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in mathematics is good overall.

- Pupils are engaged, motivated and behave well because most lessons provide them with a variety of activities which build upon what they have already learned. This includes the opportunity to solve problems and investigate. They participate in paired and group discussions – a common characteristic of their lessons. However, a minority of lessons tend to be strongly led by the teacher which restricts the input from pupils and provides fewer opportunities for independent learning.
- In most lessons, pupils are challenged well and any misconceptions identified and discussed. Teachers' planning provides for pupils of different abilities. Occasionally, those pupils who finish tasks quickly could be challenged further. In most lessons, good quality questioning by teachers helps pupils to understand new concepts presented to them.
- Pupils are keen to use the electronic whiteboards and say that these have improved both their enjoyment and understanding of mathematics. They would like more opportunity to use computers in mathematics lessons. Teachers regularly use other resources well. Teaching assistants help pupils who have learning difficulties to achieve as well as they can.
- Pupils are aware of their targets, understand what they mean and know clearly what they need to do to achieve the next level of attainment. There is a comprehensive system to track pupils' attainment and progress over time; consequently, teachers have detailed knowledge of their pupils' capabilities. However, occasionally this wealth of information is not put to good use which results in lessons that are pitched at too low a level.
- There are some good examples of marking by teachers and by pupils but the use of helpful comments on how to improve is inconsistent. Some pupils' books are not presented well and this is not picked up by staff.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The mathematics curriculum is good.

- Schemes of work are highly detailed, drawing on the Secondary National Strategy materials and published texts. They include the development of pupils' thinking and investigative skills. Attention should now be given to integrating opportunities to develop pupils' information and communication technology skills.
- Homework is used very well to extend and support learning.

- There is good extra-curricular provision for pupils. The 'maths challenge day' is very popular and enhances pupils' personal development. Gifted and talented pupils benefit from participating in events such as 'video conferences' which have enabled them to investigate and research for themselves.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- The department is led enthusiastically by the learning manager who is well supported by his deputy. Self-evaluation is thorough and effective. The department knows its strengths and weaknesses and is implementing effective improvement strategies coupled with appropriate whole-department training for staff. The departmental handbook is excellent and shows a thorough and reflective approach to evaluating and improving the work of the department.
- Performance information is thoroughly analysed and identifies trends and areas requiring improvement and intervention.
- The quality of teaching is monitored well. However, it is not clear how teachers are supported individually to improve their practice.

The enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

- Most pupils really enjoy mathematics and praise their teachers highly. Many talk happily of their expertise in the subject. They comment that they prefer working independently in pairs and groups on a task than listening to long explanations by the teacher and working from the text book.
- Pupils would like to be able to use computers more often in mathematics lessons.

Inclusion

- The school rightly prides itself on its inclusive ethos and as a result, no groups of pupils underachieve in mathematics. Lesson observations demonstrated that the needs of most pupils are met.
- The school's provision for those pupils who need extra help to 'boost' their performance is good. Pupils who experience difficulties with behaviour or learning have their needs well met by the careful deployment of teaching assistants. Gifted and talented pupils are given opportunities to excel.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- introducing more opportunities for pupils to use information and communication technology to enhance their understanding and enjoyment
- sharing good practice to raise the quality of teaching and marking to that of the best.

Citizenship

The overall effectiveness of citizenship was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good overall in those aspects of the curriculum that have been treated in depth.

- Pupils in both key stages produce good work that develops their understanding of citizenship through other subjects, particularly the humanities and English, but also in mathematics, ICT and modern foreign languages. In English, pupils prepared very good quality political speeches; in history they investigated Britain's diversity through a study of migration; and in geography they considered and made decisions on sustainability options for people in less economically developed countries.
- Standards and achievement are higher in Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3, reflecting the lack of a substantial citizenship core in the latter. In Key Stage 4 pupils show good understanding of issues such as human rights, the EU and the role of the UN. They speak about citizenship issues with confidence and write about citizenship in a range of ways, including extended and analytical writing.
- Pupils participate in a wide range of activities linked to citizenship, with much evidence available throughout the school and in assembly. Involvement in the school council and the election of representatives gives pupils a good understanding of the democratic process. The school council is very impressive.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Good teaching of citizenship and citizenship issues was observed both in PSHRE and in a range of subjects across the curriculum.
- This teaching was characterised by a clear understanding of the citizenship curriculum, a good rapport with pupils, good use of resources including ICT, and a willingness to use different learning styles.
- The quality of learning in citizenship is good. Citizenship has high status with the pupils I interviewed despite being a non-examination subject.
- A start has been made on assessment of achievement in citizenship. Written work is well marked, records are kept and reports are made to parents.

The curriculum

The citizenship curriculum has some strengths, but also major gaps.

- It is possible to find evidence of most aspects of the programme of study, but whereas some of these are treated in reasonable depth, there is little revisiting of key topics and pupils do not encounter some important aspects until Key Stage 4.

- There are strengths in both the citizenship units in the PSHRE programme and in other subject contributions. Because the latter are relatively strong, pupils are able to make links between the elements that they have studied.
- The PSHRE course provides core elements of the citizenship programme, but at present there is insufficient time for this so that important issues are heavily compressed. The school recognises this and is working towards resolving this issue.

Leadership and management of citizenship

The leadership and management of citizenship are good.

- You and your staff have a strong vision for the place of citizenship in the life and work of the school.
- There have been staffing changes in the last two years, and those with responsibility for citizenship have each made a significant impact on subject development.
- The teachers newly in charge of citizenship and PSHRE have developed a good action plan that identifies and addresses some of the weaker aspects identified in this letter.

Subject issue: teaching about Britain's diversity

- The school makes a strong contribution to pupils' understanding of Britain's diversity through its ethos and the curriculum.
- There are specific units on diversity in both PSHRE and history, with opportunities for pupils to investigate and communicate their ideas on issues such as identity, the diversity of the British army in World War 1 and migration into Stratford.

Inclusion

- The school has a very inclusive ethos. Where underperformance is identified, action is taken, as seen in the work of the diversity achievement group.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing the depth of coverage of central citizenship topics, where necessary with some revisiting to underpin progress within and between key stages
- developing the inter-relationship of the three strands of citizenship
- further developing work in citizenship and its assessment in key subject areas across the curriculum.

I very much hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop mathematics and citizenship in your school.

A copy of this feedback will be sent to your local authority and will be available to the next institutional inspection team and will be published.

In 6-12 months after the inspection visit, we would like to gather information on the impact of this inspection on the improvements in this subject in your school. To this end you may be contacted by telephone or sent a questionnaire to complete. We appreciate your co-operation in this evaluation.

Yours sincerely

Glyn Bradley-Peat
Additional Inspector