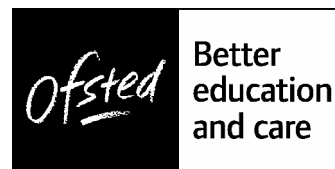


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08 December 2006

Ms Cheryl Day
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Day

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 December 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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are outstanding.

- Girls enter the school with attainment that is substantially below average. In Key Stage 3 they make very good progress and they build on this with very good progress in Key Stage 4, making outstanding progress overall between Key Stages 2 and 4.
- Students reach below average standards at the end of Key Stage 3 and broadly average standards at the end of Key Stage 4.
- Students work hard in lessons and concentrate well. Their good behaviour is supported well by staff. Most students take pride in their work, attend well, are punctual, complete their homework and work dutifully through their revision guides. They are determined to succeed and this is particularly evident in Key Stage 4. Students' application to their work contributes strongly to their progress.

- Staff effectively develop students' confidence and help to raise their expectations. However, students are slow to develop initiative and independence, and tend to rely on their teachers to give them help, hints and reminders.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good.

- There are outstanding features of teaching, such as the ways in which practical activities are closely linked to the learning objectives to enhance students' understanding and progress is monitored throughout lessons.
- Teachers have very good relationships with students. Strong mutual respect successfully enables students to offer tentative or incorrect responses, as these are supportively and constructively built on by staff to enhance learning.
- Teachers manage behaviour and increase students' confidence very effectively.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and assess students' levels of work well. They plan lessons thoroughly with learning objectives, learning outcomes, starter and plenary sessions, and provide a variety of stimulating activities drawing on a rich range of resources. On many occasions, they use mini-whiteboards shrewdly and sensitively to identify any errors and enhance students' skills.
- The best marking astutely identifies underlying misconceptions or persistent errors, and leads to dialogue between teacher and student to ameliorate them. The department is actively developing and evaluating ways to enhance the impact of marking and involve students more effectively in assessment.
- In some lessons, students do not have enough time to work on a range of problems that challenge them or to decide whether they have understood the work.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is outstanding.

- It meets the students' needs extremely well.
- Resources are excellent, with a wide range of practical equipment and interactive whiteboards that are used regularly. Deployment of staff provides expedient class sizes and effective support for students at risk of underachieving and those at early stages of learning English.
- Schemes of work contain useful references and regular opportunities for using and applying mathematics. Links to citizenship and information and communication technology (ICT) have improved since the last inspection, and the department is continuing to broaden the range of ICT experiences and opportunities for students to have hands-on use.
- There is strong provision, mainly through technology college status, for support and extension after school, on Saturdays, and at Easter. All of this provision is well attended.
- There is good informal education through well-presented corridor displays to which students have contributed.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good.

- Leaders have a clear vision of the improvements they are striving for and are effectively raising standards.
- The mathematics team works very well together in a positive environment of trust and mutual support that enables each member to develop professionally and responsibility to be shared to match strengths.
- Technology college targets have been met and challenging ones set for this year. The impact on the school and partner primary schools has been strong.
- Analysis of attainment data evaluates performance of groups well and identifies suitable areas for development. The mathematics action plan reflects these areas appropriately, although it gives details of activities rather than their impact and how it will be evaluated.
- Systems for monitoring and improving teaching and provision also effectively identify areas for development and lead to professional development, but are not sharp enough to support a continuous rise in the quality of learning or to ensure equity in provision.

Subject issue: pupils' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

Students enjoy their lessons, feel secure in the knowledge that their teacher will help them if they are stuck, and relish the sense of fulfilment they experience when they obtain correct answers. They enjoy the close relationship with, and support from, their teacher. Some students build their learning on understanding concepts and methods through the way in which they have been introduced. Where activities planned for lessons have not focused on developing understanding or on helping students find their own ways of remembering, students rely more on the method modelled by the teacher. The regular use of investigations and handling data projects helps students develop problem-solving skills as do the mathematics challenges and some lesson starters, particularly in Key Stage 3. The puzzle days in Years 7 and 10 have helped some students build confidence in being able to solve problems.

Inclusion

Inclusion is outstanding. The teachers know every student well and report any underachievement so that support can be put in place. Careful identification of those at risk of underachievement, including close monitoring of target groups, leads to good quality support which raises self-esteem as well as performance.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- focus teaching more consistently on developing students' independence and understanding
- sharpen action planning and monitoring to enable impact to be enhanced more quickly through more frequent evaluation and response.

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

Gill Close
Her Majesty's Inspector