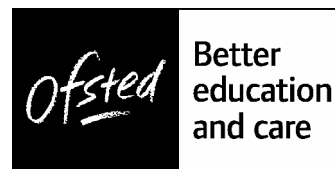


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Mrs P Wager
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Wager

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 14 and 15 February 2007 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 lessons.

The inspection focussed principally on mathematics in Years 7 to 11.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good and improving.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Standards have risen sharply in Key Stage 3 in the last 2 years. In 2005, students made satisfactory progress attaining standards which were above average by the end of Year 9. Results of the 2006 tests indicate targets were exceeded with more students gaining Level 5 and above. Whilst these students were a more able group on entry to the school in 2003, they did better than might generally be expected. The proportions of students gaining Levels 6 and above increased significantly. Early indications are that these students made outstanding progress.
- Standards are also rising at GCSE. In 2005, students attained broadly average standards and made sound progress over their five years in school. Early indications from the 2006 GCSE results show that whilst the percentage of A* to

C grades remained broadly similar, the proportion gaining the highest grades A* and A increased substantially.

- In lessons, standards overall were observed to be above average with good progress being made by most students.
- Students' personal development in mathematics lessons is outstanding. They behave exceptionally well and demonstrate very good attitudes to learning.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good.

- Teachers are experienced; their good understanding of mathematics and rapport with students results in a very strong working ethos and good pace of learning in most lessons. However, whilst teachers plan their lessons soundly, there is a need in some lessons for the repertoire of teaching and learning approaches used to engage students to be broadened.
- Students are regularly assessed to ensure teachers know how well they are doing; however, in some lessons best use of this information is not always made to ensure each student receives the appropriate level of challenge. Students' self-assessment of how well they are doing is developing. Whilst students know their current and target levels or grades, the varying quality of feedback on their work means some are less clear on how to improve.
- Homework is regularly set to develop and consolidate learning.
- Students who have learning difficulties are supported very well to achieve their potential.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- The curriculum for Years 10 and 11 has recently been developed through the use of a modular course to meet students' needs more fully. Lower-ability students also have the opportunity to gain an on-line numeracy qualification.
- Using and applying mathematics is a feature of the students' curriculum in Years 7 to 9 though it has not yet been fully integrated into lessons.
- Good links have been established with the local education business partnership to enhance the curriculum with themed days to develop students' mathematical skills.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good with some very strong features.

- The head of department is in her third year as subject leader. She has worked very hard to raise standards and achievement, as reflected in the much improved results of national Year 9 tests in 2006.
- She has a very clear vision for the department. Concerted actions have been taken to address areas for development, though the full impact for some has yet to be felt.

- The head of department has established an enthusiastic teaching team and good arrangements are in place to ensure a smooth transition for primary pupils joining Year 7.
- Whilst some information communication technology is used in lessons, its potential has not yet been sufficiently exploited to fully enhance students' learning.

Subject issue: students' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

Students say that their enjoyment of their lessons is best when starter activities are interesting and when teachers require them to take an active part in thinking through what they have to do. Students say they get least enjoyment from a lesson where they spend too much time working through text-book questions or when the teacher does not consolidate the learning well enough. Students overall have a good understanding of mathematics. Most see the links between various areas of mathematics and can draw on their previous learning to help solve problems.

Inclusion

Inclusion is good. The monitoring of students' progress has been developed well by the head of department. Appropriate actions are taken to address inconsistencies in performance. Students relate very well to each other, respect staff, and develop personal qualities securely. The head of department's commitment to good standards is paying dividends, for example, as seen in the results of the most recent Year 9 national tests.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- develop the use of student assessment data in teachers' lesson planning to ensure all students are challenged appropriately
- extend the repertoire of teaching and learning activities used in some lessons
- improve the quality of feedback some students receive on their work in order that they all 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