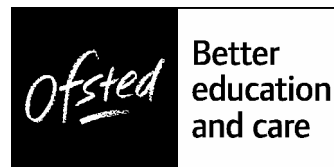


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12 March 2007

Ms M Crow
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Dear Ms Crow

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 with Jan Bennett HMI on 8 and 9 March 2007 to look at work in mathematics. As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of mathematics, the visit had a focus on students' enjoyment and understanding.

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 12 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- In both key stages, standards and achievement have risen in 2006, following a drop in 2005.
- In 2005, students made satisfactory progress attaining broadly average standards by the end of Year 9. 2006 test results indicate that, whilst the target was missed, slightly more students gained Level 5 and above, despite being a less able group on entry to the school in 2003. Early indications suggest they did better than might generally be expected.
- At GCSE in 2005, students attained below average standards and made broadly satisfactory progress over their five years in school. Early indications from the 2006 results show that the percentage of A* to C grades increased substantially, regaining ground lost in 2005 to be slightly higher than in 2004.

- In lessons, standards overall were broadly average with satisfactory progress being made by most students.
- Students' personal development in mathematics lessons is satisfactory. Most students behave appropriately though low-level disruption is an issue in some lessons.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are satisfactory.

- Teachers are experienced; they have a good understanding of mathematics and generally a positive rapport with students, resulting in a satisfactory pace of learning in most lessons. However, there is a need in some lessons for the repertoire of teaching and learning approaches used to engage students to be broadened and for best practice to be shared.
- Students are regularly assessed to ensure teachers know how well they are doing. However, best use of this information is not always made to ensure each student receives the appropriate level of challenge. Whilst students know their current and target levels or grades, the varying quality of written feedback on their work means they are less clear on how to improve.
- Occasionally teachers do not make sufficiently clear to some students what they have to do. This results in a lack of engagement and a reduced pace of learning.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- In Year 10, middle and higher ability students study GCSE statistics, whilst lower ability students who are at risk of disaffection are entered early for GCSE mathematics. However, progression for this group in Year 11 is not sufficiently focussed. A few of the most able students in Year 11 study AS-level mathematics.
- Outside lessons, students are able to study mathematics using the school's website. However, in lessons students make inconsistent use of information communication technology (ICT) to develop their learning.
- Students have opportunities to get involved in extra-curricular activities including a mathematics club and revision sessions to enhance their learning.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- You have a very clear view of the strengths and weaknesses in the department. Self-evaluation contributes to an appropriate action plan. Monitoring of teaching is regular, though the views of students' are not sufficiently taken into account.
- The department has worked hard to raise standards and realises the need to build further on this. However, a lack of rigour means the sustainability of recent improvements is not ensured.

- Whilst target setting takes place, it too lacks rigour and the quality of teachers' assessment is too variable to gauge students' progress accurately.
- Teachers have good access to resources. Electronic schemes of work have been developed recently. However, the head of department recognises further work is needed in order to support teaching fully.

Subject issue: students' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

Students say their enjoyment of their lessons is best when they are involved in group work, solving mathematical puzzles, or taking an active part in their learning. They get least enjoyment where they spend too much time working through textbook questions or when the teacher does not explain the work clearly. The weaker attitude to learning of some students is an irritation to their peers.

Students are developing a satisfactory understanding of mathematics. The more able students can see connections between various areas of mathematics and generally understand how to draw on their previous learning to help solve problems. Lower ability students are only beginning to make the links.

Inclusion

Inclusion is satisfactory. Overall students make sound progress. However, the department identifies the need to ensure middle ability students in both key stages and the higher ability in Key Stage 3 are supported sufficiently to achieve their potential. A learning support assistant, working exclusively in the mathematics department, enhances the support students receive. Whilst teachers plan lessons to meet the needs of different groups of students, in practice, most students do the same work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- share good practice to develop the repertoire of teaching and learning activities used to engage and meet students' different learning needs
- improve the rigour of the monitoring functions in the department
- develop the quality of target setting and written feedback students receive on their work in order that they know how to improve.

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