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Dear Mr Vickers

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme 2006/07 - Mathematics and Citizenship

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit with my colleague Rod Passant, Additional Inspector, on 19 and 20 March 2007 to look at work in mathematics and citizenship. As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, my visit had a particular focus on pupils' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics and the citizenship visit had a particular focus on provision for teaching and learning about Britain's diversity.

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.

### Mathematics

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 parts of 10 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics was judged to be good.

#### Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Results in national tests and examinations have been above average in recent years, representing good progress for the students concerned.

Students currently in the school are also achieving above average standards in their work.

- Students gain knowledge and skills more successfully than they develop an understanding of mathematical ideas, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
- Students generally have good attitudes to mathematics lessons, though occasionally they lose concentration when their teacher does not engage or hold their interest.

### Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good.

- The quality of teaching is generally better in Years 7 to 9 and in the sixth form because, in these years, students are generally more actively involved in lessons than they are in Years 10 and 11, where teaching is satisfactory.
- A particular strength of the best lessons is that teachers ask searching questions that encourage students to think through their ideas. When they are also encouraged to explain their thinking, students make really good progress in consolidating their understanding.
- Most teachers establish good working relationships and create a positive atmosphere in which students strive to do well. Occasionally, especially with students in Years 10 and 11, teachers find it difficult to engage or interest some students and this leads to a lack of concentration.
- The marking of students' work is good. Detailed comments provide helpful information to students on how well they are doing and on what they need to do to improve.

### Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- The faculty has made good progress in meeting the requirements of the new GCSE syllabuses.
- The faculty's documentation sets out the content of courses well but does not provide teachers with enough guidance on how to help students gain an understanding of mathematical ideas.
- Whilst some investigative activities help to develop students' capabilities in using and applying mathematics, not enough is done to enhance this aspect of students' work on a day-to-day basis.
- A wide range of activities, including additional classes for older students, booster sessions for all Year 9 students, special events, visits with a mathematical focus and participation in mathematics challenges enrich the overall provision for mathematics in the school.

### Subject leadership and management

Leadership and management are good.

- The head of the faculty, ably supported by senior managers, has created a good sense of teamwork amongst mathematics teachers.
- The mathematics faculty's evaluation of its current position is thorough and accurate. Building from this evaluation, the faculty has a clear set of priorities for further improvement that all members of the department are striving to achieve.
- Detailed observation of teaching and learning has helped to identify strengths and areas where improvement is needed. However, these areas are not always described sharply enough to help teachers improve their work. This is particularly the case in the observations of some lessons in Years 10 and 11.

Subject issue: pupils' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

Students enjoy learning mathematics when they are actively engaged and interested in their lessons. This is more often the case in Years 7 to 9 and in the sixth form, where students are encouraged to take part in a wider range of activities than they are in Years 10 and 11. Some teachers ask searching questions which provide students with opportunities to explain and describe their thinking. By so doing, they help build up students' understanding of mathematical ideas. This happens more often in lessons for younger students and those in the sixth form. Students value the efforts teachers make to help them learn facts, skills and routines and recognise the success they have in these aspects of the subject. They have less grasp of the potential for understanding mathematical ideas because these are not consistently highlighted by teachers as being important. Discussions with students demonstrate that they have the potential to benefit from engaging more in activities of the type that would enable them to develop their investigative and problem-solving abilities.

### Inclusion

The mathematics faculty ensures that all students are able to access all that it provides. Boys and girls do equally well. The grouping of students by ability helps to ensure that most are challenged sufficiently for them to achieve their potential. Students with learning difficulties or disabilities are supported well in class through carefully planned activities and by the support of teaching assistants.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- extend the good teaching and learning developed in Years 7 to 9 and the sixth form to Years 10 and 11
- improve students' abilities, and build up their confidence, to explain and describe their thinking and reasoning as a means of improving their understanding of mathematical ideas

- provide more opportunities for students to develop their abilities in using and applying mathematics.

## Citizenship

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 four lessons or part lessons.

The overall effectiveness of citizenship was judged to be satisfactory. There are some strong features.

### Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in citizenship are currently good.

- By Year 11, students have above average knowledge of the aspects of citizenship they study, such as rights and responsibilities and the role of central government. In discussion, students demonstrate that they have understood the links between their citizenship course and their religious education course, 'Religion and Society', taught as a half GCSE to all students. It has high status in students' eyes because the work is interesting and provides them with an opportunity to express their points of view.
- Written work varies in quality but some very good work was observed. For example, higher attaining students wrote quickly, accurately, and at some length to put forward a reasoned case for or against capital punishment as part of a revision lesson in religious education.
- Students interviewed were particularly confident and articulate. The majority of students participate in school activities. For the minority who do not, it is included as an identified personal development target in the school's target-setting arrangements. There are good opportunities for older students to take responsibility within the school, for example, as mentors or sports leaders.
- Work in Year 9 folders varies in content and quality between form groups. The work undertaken when students were in Year 7 and 8 is more substantial than recent work. 'There is less time for thinking now' was how one student put it.
- Much work is rightly discussion based. There are examples of extended writing where students present the pros and cons of an argument. Although Year 9 students were confident and articulate, they were less certain how they could demonstrate responsibility around the school.
- School assessment identifies that by the end of Year 9, 50 per cent of students are at the expected level and a further 30 per cent approximately are working above expectations. The subject leader's evaluation is that there should be a higher proportion of students exceeding expectations.
- Post 16 students study citizenship within the AS/ A2 General Studies programme which all students take.

- Overall, in the few lessons seen, students, girls in particular, were well behaved, confident and articulate, and prepared to express and support their views. Boys sometimes took shelter in short answers.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory

- Very skilled teaching of citizenship issues was seen in religious education in the upper school.
- Students were articulate in describing what a good lesson looked like. They were also clear that when citizenship was timetabled as a full period they had time for role-plays and discussion. Under the current arrangements, they said lessons were rushed so that there was less time for active approaches and more writing and completing work sheets. It was also evident from discussion with students in the same year group that they now had different experiences because of the way individual teachers interpreted the course.
- The school's evaluation of teaching of citizenship last year identified that learning was not as strong as teaching. Teachers are skilled, motivated, plan well, take the subject seriously and have very good relationships with their class. However, the level of engagement is variable.
- The programme identifies periodic assessment opportunities for Key Stages 3 and 4. The subject development plan identifies the improvement of the assessment arrangements for Key Stage 4 in the next academic year. Currently, particularly amongst the boys spoken to, the fact that the subject is non-examinable reduces its status.

### Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory but the planned provision is good.

- At the time of the last inspection, all students in Years 7 to 9 had one hour-long period of citizenship education taught by their form teacher. The citizenship programme was somewhat fragmented in Years 10 and 11. To ensure that students in Years 10 and 11 had a core entitlement of citizenship, the school has extended the tutor time for all year groups one day a week so that citizenship can be taught within it from 8.30 am to 9.15 am. All citizenship lessons take place at the same time, involving some 40 plus tutors. The school describes all activities that take place within this session as citizenship although it includes personal, social and health education work.
- The coherent citizenship programme covers all the elements in the citizenship programmes of study. Each tutor has a pack that contains the units of work and suggested lesson plans. The links between the three strands that make up citizenship education are stressed, as is the distinction between citizenship and personal, social and health education. Assessment opportunities are identified and there has been an assessment

moderation session with Year 9 tutors. All tutors are expected to report on citizenship as part of the school's normal subject reporting process. Some additional training is undertaken in the termly citizenship meeting.

- At Key Stage 4 the citizenship programme is augmented by the religious education 'Religion and Society' course. Because it is taught particularly well, the course provides depth and rigour in the coverage of units and makes a very significant contribution to students' good subject knowledge.
- There is variation between classes in students' experience of citizenship: students suggested that some teachers tended to focus to a greater extent on the personal, social and health education aspects.

### Leadership and management of citizenship

Leadership and management are good with some outstanding features.

- There is a clear vision for the subject. Indeed, it is reflected high up in the school's overall published aims. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Self-evaluation is excellent and a high quality programme has been assembled with what the school judges to be a good range of resources. The subject leader is an outstanding champion for the subject.
- The planned course provision is good with supportive material to help teachers in their planning. There is a brief induction for new staff.
- Whilst there is a very clear subject policy statement and the differences between citizenship and personal, social and health education are spelled out in the teachers' packs, nevertheless a degree of confusion remains. Currently the subject leader is teaching in the sixth form at the same time as citizenship lessons are taking place elsewhere, so there is no monitoring of or support for teachers.
- The school has taken steps to improve the provision for Key Stage 4 from its former fragmented state by providing a core course. However, there are significant pressures on this time from aspects such as work related learning, enterprise education and health education.

### Subject issue: provision for teaching and learning about Britain's diversity

The school's provision for teaching about ethnic diversity is good. Year 8 students study units on discrimination, ethnic identities and human rights. Further units on stereotypes and equal opportunities and the global community are also explored. In addition, religious education makes specific contributions through the work on multi-faith and the Religion and Society GCSE looks at British diversity. One student said that she thought one of the principal aims of citizenship was to develop respect for others.

## Inclusion

Inclusion is good. An advantage of the current system is that form tutors and the form group know each other well so that there is an inclusive ethos in classrooms.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to ensure that the senior leadership team monitors the teaching of citizenship to promote consistently high standards
- to ensure that the subject leader is available when citizenship is taught so that she is able to monitor and provide support as part of an ongoing process
- to establish a development group, comprising representatives from the senior leadership team and the subject leader, to take the subject forward within the context of conflicting demands.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop mathematics and citizenship 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

George Knights  
Additional Inspector