

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6855
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr Hogarth
Headteacher
The Archbishop's School
St Stephen's Hill
Canterbury
Kent
CT2 7AP

Dear Mr Hogarth

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Evaluation of the Primary and Secondary National Strategies

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 4 and 5 June 2007 to look at work in the Secondary National Strategy (SNS).

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the SNS, the visit had a particular focus on the impact of Assessment for learning (AfL).

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

Standards and achievement in the school are outstanding. The overall effectiveness of the SNS was judged to be satisfactory. This is because the school has instigated its own developments to raise standards independent of the SNS.

Achievement and standards

Students' achievement in mathematics is outstanding. The impact of the school's systems for AfL on students' achievement and personal development is good.

- Students enter school with standards in line with national average. By the end of Key Stage 4 students achieve standards well above the national average in mathematics. This represents outstanding progress.
- At Key Stage 4 standards are improving at a faster rate than the national average. In 2006 both boys and girls attained similar high standards. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) make good progress.
- Students' attitudes to learning are excellent. They are very appreciative of their teachers' efforts to ensure they understand mathematics.

Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning in mathematics is good. The impact of the school's system for AfL on teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and relationships between students and teachers are excellent. Teachers know their students very well. They have high expectations of all their students and plan effectively to meet their needs. One student said, 'No student will be left behind; teachers will teach you until you understand it.'
- Well planned schemes of work, closely aligned to the national curriculum, are linked to regular assessment opportunities.
- Lessons are predominantly teacher led and opportunities for students to work collaboratively are limited.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is good. The impact of AfL on the curriculum is good.

- Schemes of work have clear and well structured assessment points. Students understand the mathematics department's flexible systems for setting and report that, 'Teachers do what is right for you.'
- The curriculum is responsive to students' needs. For example, additional classes have been created to support students who need extra help in mathematics.
- The use of ICT to support students' learning in mathematics is underdeveloped.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management of mathematics are outstanding. The effectiveness of leadership and management of the SNS AfL is satisfactory.

- The mathematics subject leader, through rigorous monitoring and evaluation, has a detailed knowledge of the progress students make.

Students are fully aware that if their progress is not as it should be they will receive support.

- Senior leaders have embedded a systematic, coherent and effective process for tracking students' achievement and targeting underperformance. Regular opportunities to discuss students' progress at middle managers meetings ensure that students' achievements are considered holistically.
- Limited use has been made of the SNS. Senior leaders have devised their own systems for targeting underperformance which serves the needs of the students well. There is some involvement in the SNS through subject leaders' meetings.

Assessment for learning

The impact of the school's systems for AfL overall is good.

- The school has devised its own assessment procedures which ensure that teachers shape their planning and the curriculum in the context of their analyses of students' performance.
- The school has adapted its reports to parents to ensure they identify clearly what students need to do to improve their work. Good practice is seen in the individual letters sent to sixth form students regarding their expected grades and what they need to do to achieve the higher level challenge grades.
- Good AfL strategies were seen in lessons where teachers asked students to reflect on and share the errors they made. Students ask very good mathematical questions, which teachers confidently address.

Inclusion

The impact of the school's systems for AfL on inclusion is good.

- The responsive curriculum and very good teaching ensures students with LDD enjoy and achieve in mathematics. Teachers are effective in making mathematics relevant and meaningful for them.
- Teachers know their students well and deploy resources effectively to support their learning. New staff members are trained in-house to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Support staff are deployed effectively to ensure all students are able to access the curriculum and achieve well.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- develop opportunities for students to work more collaboratively
- develop opportunities to make greater use of ICT in mathematics lessons.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop mathematics and assessment for learning in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, 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

Asyia Kazmi
Her Majesty's Inspector