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Dr Antony Edkins  
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Dear Dr Edkins

Ofsted 2006-07 survey inspection programme – mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 14 and 15 June 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. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

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 eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the subject was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is satisfactory. Standards are low but rising.

- Attainment on entry to the school is below average. Standards attained are low although they improved at Key Stage 3 in 2006 and indications are that there will be a significant rises in results at both key stages this year.
- Students had not made the progress expected of them in the past few years but behaviour is much improved and students are making satisfactory or better progress in lessons.
- An increasing number of students who would not previously have obtained any formal qualifications are achieving adult numeracy qualifications.

## Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in mathematics is good.

- Lessons are carefully planned and include a good variety of activities. A brisk pace is maintained and students are kept busy and motivated throughout their lessons. Skilful questioning is used to check learning and to clear up any misunderstandings.
- In the best lessons, teachers have very good classroom management skills and an enthusiasm for the subject. The students respond by showing a lively interest in their work and a willingness to participate. They work hard and learning is very good. Lessons are less effective when students have not been adequately prepared for tasks and do not understand what is required of them.
- The teachers set and mark homework regularly. The quality of marking varies but is generally satisfactory or better.
- All students know their target grades and the current level at which they are working but this is not always recorded in the tracking document.

## Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is being reviewed and improved to meet the needs of students. Basic schemes of work are available and there are plans to improve them for next year.
- An effective foundation curriculum for Year 7 was introduced this year to ease the transition from primary school. Students develop and apply mathematical skills as part of their work on cross-subject projects and themes. Further work is needed, however, to ensure that all the required aspects of mathematics are covered fully; this is being addressed for next year.
- A priority for the school is to ensure that every student gains a mathematics qualification. Lower band students take foundation tier GCSE in Year 10. In Year 11, a range of options is available including GCSE statistics, an adult numeracy course or a key skills programme focusing on personal finance capability.
- Teachers make good use of information and communication technology (ICT) in lessons but students' access to ICT resources is limited, especially on the Longshaw site.

## Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory and improving.

- Led by an energetic and inspirational headteacher, the school has been transformed since 2004 from one that required special measures to a rapidly improving school. Mathematics, however, has had several recent changes of leadership and is one of the areas that has taken longer to recover. A new head of mathematics was appointed in September and she is taking the department forward. She has set a clear direction, improved performance management and developed key procedures and policies. Nonetheless, a number of monitoring and support systems are taking time to become established.

- After a long period of serious staffing shortages the teaching team has been strengthened and a well qualified team is now in place with a good blend of experience and expertise. The quality of teaching and learning has improved considerably and is now good.
- Both the headteacher and head of mathematics know the strengths and weaknesses of the subject area. Self-evaluation is accurate; there are clear priorities for improvement and challenging targets have been set for standards and achievement. The capacity to improve is good.

Subject issue: students' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

Improvements in teaching have led to increased understanding and enjoyment. Teachers use a wide range of strategies to engage students' interest and develop understanding. Students in Key Stage 3 enjoy working in groups, investigative work and games. Students in Key Stage 4 are focused on 'making up lost ground'. They get enjoyment and satisfaction from understanding concepts and being able to answer examination questions. All students appreciate teachers who can explain things clearly and in different ways. In lessons, students respond well to questioning and are willing to share their understanding and explain their answers.

Inclusion

The school's approach to inclusion in mathematics is good. All students are set individual targets and there is a responsive range of support to cater for individual needs. Teaching assistants are used well in lessons. Students with behavioural difficulties attend sessions to build their self esteem and increase their motivation. Mathematics clubs after school provide a comfortable place in which students can concentrate on their homework and receive help. Gifted and talented students are stretched and challenged in lessons and given opportunities to excel.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving achievement and standards in mathematics
- carrying out plans to strengthen aspects of the curriculum, namely schemes of work and coverage of the mathematics curriculum in Year 7
- ensuring that systems for management and support are implemented fully.

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

Jan Bennett  
Her Majesty's Inspector