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Mr P Lang
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Dear Mr Lang

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Evaluation of the impact of the Secondary National Strategy

I am grateful for the hospitality and co-operation of you and your staff during my visit on 6-7 December to look at work in the Secondary National Strategy (SNS). 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 scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work, observation of six lessons and interviews with staff and pupils.

The overall effectiveness and impact of the SNS in mathematics is satisfactory, with good features.

The department has made good use of the SNS to support its planning of work to meet the needs of all pupils. Good use has been made of the 'Teach First' scheme to recruit promising mathematics specialists and the SNS has played a key role in ensuring that teaching and learning has been satisfactory or better, despite the team's inexperience. Some progress has been made in improving standards and achievement.

Achievement and standards

The impact of the SNS on achievement in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Standards in mathematics are improving but remain below average, reflecting pupils' attainment when they join the school. The department has raised achievement in Key Stage 3 mathematics in the last year and pupils now make satisfactory progress in both key stages. GCSE results

were adversely affected by staffing issues in 2006 and did not improve. The present Year 11 made inadequate progress in Key Stage 3 but the new mathematics team is working hard to make up the lost ground.

Quality of teaching and learning

The impact of the SNS on teaching and learning in mathematics is good.

- The influence of the SNS is evident in teachers' use of learning objectives and their lesson planning. The impact of the SNS has been good because the Key Stage 3 Framework has helped inexperienced teachers to plan in detail and to teach satisfactory lessons.
- Teachers and students are increasingly aware of assessment levels and what they need to do to reach the next level. There is an effective system for assessing students' work by end of unit tests. Test papers are analysed well to identify areas for improvement for each student.
- Teachers have a secure knowledge of mathematics, and can demonstrate appropriate methods, but they are not yet effective in teaching pupils the mathematical principles that would enable them to think independently.

Quality of curriculum

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

- Good use has been made of the SNS Framework for mathematics to guide departmental planning. The department has a well specified scheme of work, annotated with notes of guidance to teachers and including good modifications to ensure progression for pupils of different ability.
- As the school recognises in its self evaluation, the mathematics curriculum currently plays a limited role in developing pupils' independent learning skills.
- ICT use by students is inconsistent, partly due to the temporary accommodation used by some mathematics classes.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management of the SNS in mathematics are good.

- The school is raising expectations through improved monitoring and better use of data. This has had some impact on standards and achievement, especially in Key Stage 3, demonstrating the school's capacity to improve.
- The head of mathematics is committed to raising standards and monitors lessons effectively. She provides effective leadership for an inexperienced team. The department's self evaluation includes a close and effective analysis of data and successfully identifies *what* needs to be improved. However, the self evaluation lacks the sharp analysis of teaching and learning that is needed to identify *how* the improvement is to be made.

For example, the school wants students to be more self-reliant, but its improvement plans do not indicate in detail how this will be achieved.

- The annual staff conference is a good use of professional development resources, bringing the whole staff together to focus on key issues. Good use is made of the Strategy's Secondary Intensive Support Programme and its local Heads of Mathematics Network. Both provide an effective catalyst for discussion and evaluation of teaching and learning.
- Proposals to change the curriculum to allow early entry to GCSE for some pupils are not supported by a strong rationale explaining how a year can be cut from the programme without sacrificing the depth of understanding such pupils will need if they continue to study mathematics.

The provision for inclusion

The provision for inclusion is satisfactory.

- Pupils of white British heritage achieve less well than those from minority ethnic groups. Boys make more progress than girls. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve satisfactorily.
- Students' progress is monitored regularly. In mathematics, schemes of work are specified for each teaching group, based on prior attainment, helping to meet the needs of high and low attaining pupils. An exception is in Year 7, where pupils are taught in mixed ability groups until Christmas.
- Provision for the most able students in mathematics has improved, leading to more A and A* grades at GCSE and increasing participation and success rates at A level, including Further Mathematics. There is an effective programme to support older pupils who need help with numeracy.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- continuing to improve standards and achievement, especially in GCSE
- in the longer term, adapting approaches to teaching and learning to place greater emphasis on enabling students to think for themselves
- improving the evaluation of evidence from lesson observation and work scrutiny to sharpen the focus of improvement planning.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop your use of the Secondary National Strategy 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

Stephen Abbott
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools