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Dear Dr Bizley

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 25 - 26 September 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) and quality of programmes for disengaged/disaffected students.

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 nine lessons.

At the time of the visit the headteacher and deputy headteacher had been in post three weeks. The subject leader had been in post for a year.

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

#### Achievement and standards

Students' achievement in mathematics is satisfactory. The impact of AfL on students' achievement and personal development is also satisfactory.

- Standards in mathematics are in line with national averages and are improving steadily. The progress students make between Years 7 and 11 is satisfactory given their starting points. Senior leaders are committed to improving students' achievement and are setting ambitious targets for them.
- The department's focus on improving attainment for higher ability students had a significant impact as seen in the increased number of students, particularly boys, gaining Level 8 in mathematics. Targeted intervention for groups of students also had an impact with many attaining above their predicted grades. Students are appreciative of the extra mathematics support available to them outside lessons.
- Many students are enthusiastic about mathematics and engage actively in lessons. However, low level disruption caused by some students hinders their learning and that of others. In some lessons the school's behaviour policy is not systematically applied.

### Quality of teaching and learning in mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning in mathematics is satisfactory. The impact of AfL on teaching and learning is also satisfactory.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge. Relationships between students and teachers are generally good. A few teachers plan lessons using creative activities which develop students' thinking. In an outstanding lesson, students worked collaboratively and confidently linking challenging mathematical concepts.
- Teachers use questioning well to develop individual students' mathematical reasoning. However, discussion between students is less well developed and too often lessons are overly led by teachers which hinders students' independence in learning.
- Students are expected to assess their own work. Their assessment informs teachers' planning but this lacks rigour and gaps in students' learning are not always addressed.
- Teachers' marking usually gives advice to students on how their work can be improved but students do not always respond to the helpful comments teachers have made.

### Quality of curriculum

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

- Schemes of work have been adapted from the SNS. Students enjoy opportunities to use ICT in mathematics. Good use is made of web based resources to address gaps in students' understanding. The use of games and creative activities further enhance students' learning.
- New schemes of work in Year 7, with regular and systematic assessment opportunities built in, are enabling teachers to have a better understanding of students' strengths and weaknesses but this work is at an early stage. Although,

enhanced by some creative units of work, schemes of work do not identify key teaching points or questions that develop mathematical thinking.

## Leadership and management

Leadership and management in mathematics are satisfactory. The effectiveness of the leadership and management of AfL is also satisfactory.

- The subject leader for mathematics is a passionate advocate for her subject. She has excellent subject and pedagogical knowledge. Her vision for mathematics teaching and learning is beginning to impact in lessons and is raising teachers' and students' expectations.
- Developments in mathematics, such as new schemes of work and greater focus on mathematical reasoning, are at an early stage but are already beginning to impact on standards and teaching. However, there are variations in practice across the department and a lack of formal monitoring and evaluation systems hinders the progression of teaching skills and AfL in mathematics.
- The subject leader undertakes detailed analysis of end-of-key stage results; this informs intervention programmes for students at risk of underachieving in Key Stage 4. Similar systems in Key Stage 3 are now being developed.

## Assessment for learning

The impact of AfL overall is satisfactory.

- The SNS is just one of the resources being used to develop teaching and learning and raise standards. Teacher's questioning skills are improving. Most teachers expect students to explain their reasoning. Activities requiring students to think mathematically are planned into lessons. However, too many lessons are overly teacher led and opportunities for students to work independently are limited.
- Students have a good understanding of the levels they are working at and what their target grades are through a termly reporting system. Students are also expected to self-assess against learning objectives.

## The quality of programmes for disaffected students

The quality of programmes for disaffected students is good.

- There are good systems to identify students who are at risk of underachieving or becoming disaffected. Through this monitoring a variety of support programmes are triggered including curriculum support, emotional literacy development and work with learning mentors. This support has had good impact on the achievement of disaffected students. Senior leaders are also developing the curriculum to engage disaffected learners by improving the vocational options.
- An innovative programme to identify vulnerable students starts in the primary school. Through close working with primary school teachers, students who are at risk of disaffection or are vulnerable are identified early. As a result, about 20

Year 6 students start an induction programme of 6 weeks in the summer term. The programme eases these students into life in a secondary school.

- The learning support unit supports students with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The inclusion department monitors the progress of students and although not all students meet their academic predictions, the success of its work can be seen in the number engaged in education who might otherwise not be.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- evaluating the impact of training to improve teaching and learning and develop consistency in practice
- developing students' mathematical reasoning by ensuring teaching provides opportunities for discussion and collaborative working
- developing a consistent approach to marking and feedback and ensuring that students act upon the feedback given.

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