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Mr Fry  
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Dear Mr Fry

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 15 - 16 October 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 8 lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

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

- Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 until 2007 were significantly above average, they declined in 2007 in mathematics and are now slightly above average. Standards at Key Stage 4 are above average.
- There is a significant minority of students, particularly girls, who do not make as much progress as they should.
- Students are very appreciative of the help teachers give them. They would welcome more opportunities for group work rather than working from text books. Some students report that the behaviour of a small minority of students impacts on the learning of others.

### 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.
- Students enthusiastically participate in collaborative activities when they are planned into lessons.
- Teachers use questioning well to develop individual students' mathematical reasoning. Discussion between students is less well developed.
- Data is not always used effectively to build on students' prior knowledge hence weaknesses in students' learning are not systematically addressed and work is not always set to match students' needs or abilities.
- The majority of books are marked by teachers. A few teachers give helpful advice to students on how their work can be improved but do not always ensure students follow this up.

### Quality of curriculum

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

- Schemes of work are adapted from the SNS but teachers do not consistently make effective use of them.
- Although, regular half-termly assessment is undertaken, the information is not used to adapt the curriculum or to target underperforming students systematically for further support.
- The over-reliance on web based mathematics packages hampers opportunities for students to work collaboratively and restricts the pace of learning.

### Leadership and management

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

- Staff observe each others' lessons. However, a lack of rigour in monitoring teaching and learning inhibits the systematic development of teaching skills and AfL in mathematics. There is no formal evaluation of provision.
- Students' progress is regularly updated on a central database. However, this information is not interrogated well enough to inform departmental decisions, for example in relation to the gender gap.

### Assessment for learning

The impact of AfL overall is satisfactory.

- Significant use is made of SNS resources, including consultant support, to develop teaching and learning.
- Teachers identify learning objectives.
- There are opportunities for students to consolidate or reflect on learning.
- Students do not have accurate understanding of their strengths and weaknesses in mathematics and do not know what they need to do to improve.
- Progress has been made in developing AfL across the school.

### The quality of programmes for disaffected students

The quality of programmes for disaffected students is satisfactory.

- Students at risk of becoming disaffected are identified early. Vocational provision in conjunction with the local college has been developed for them. Teachers provide catch up sessions to ensure students are up to date on coursework or receive support in developing essential key skills however this is not systematically monitored.
- Some students, because of the support provided to them, have continued in education when otherwise they may not have. Senior leaders do not evaluate the impact of this support on targeted students' achievement and standards.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring assessment information is used effectively to accelerate students' progress and drive improvements
- developing monitoring and evaluation so it is sharply focused on improving teaching and learning of all students
- developing students' mathematical reasoning by ensuring teaching provides opportunities for discussion and collaborative work.

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