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Mr Bryan  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Bryan

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 December 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 mathematics, the impact of Assessment for learning (AfL) and the 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 eight lessons.

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

#### Achievement and standards

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

- Students enter the school with standards which are in line with the national average in mathematics. By the end of Key Stage 4 standards have declined and are below average.

- Students' progress between Years 7 and 9 is significantly below expectation. Students do not build on the standards attained in Year 9 and their achievement in Key Stage 4 is particularly low.
- Although most teachers are adept at creating a calm working environment, in a few lessons, students' behaviour hinders learning.

### Quality of teaching and learning in mathematics

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

- Teaching in a majority of lessons was satisfactory or better but in too many it was inadequate.
- Lessons are usually well-structured and teachers share the learning objectives with students. A few teachers skilfully use a plenary to draw together learning and reflect on the concepts introduced in the lesson.
- There is some effective questioning to develop students' mathematical reasoning. However, it is inconsistent and in too many lessons teachers' questioning does not challenge students.
- Teachers do not always ensure work matches the needs of all students or builds on their prior knowledge. There is insufficient support for lower attaining students or challenge for more able learners.
- Teachers' comments in marking too often relates to students' attitudes. Very few comments were observed in books which furthered students' mathematical knowledge or thinking.

### Quality of curriculum

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

- The curriculum does not ensure that students' achievement matches their ability. Schemes of work in Key Stage 3 support teachers but they do not indicate how to match work to students' prior learning. This hinders progression between units and between years. Additionally, similar schemes of work do not exist in Key Stage 4.
- Teachers have worked together to devise key questions that develop mathematical thinking linked to key objectives. However, evidence of their use was not seen in lessons observed or in teachers' planning.
- In Year 11, analysis of students' mathematical difficulties informs future teaching but this approach is not consistent across all year groups or teachers.
- There is a lack of rigor in developing students' literacy in mathematics which hampers their ability to progress in mathematical reasoning and to access higher level mathematics.

## Leadership and management

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

- The subject leader does not undertake formal and consistent monitoring of teaching and learning in the department. As a consequence, information is not available about the implementation of departmental policy, developmental needs of teachers or the progress of students across year groups.
- A new system to monitor the progress of all Year 11 students has been introduced. This is giving the subject leader useful information to target intervention strategies but it does not yet exist for other year groups.
- Analysis of students' standards and progress lacks rigour; it does not identify strengths and weaknesses in their learning or how different groups have progressed, leading to a lack of urgency in bringing about improvement.

## Assessment for learning

The impact of AfL overall is inadequate.

- The implementation of AfL practices is inconsistent.
- Students do not always understand the purpose of self-assessment.
- Some students are set targets which are too low when compared with their prior attainment. Additionally, not all students are aware of their targets or understand how they are set.

## The quality of programmes for disaffected students

The quality of programmes for disaffected students is satisfactory.

- Some Key Stage 4 students attend courses at a local college. The success of this programme is seen in students exceeding expectations and all achieving Level 2 qualifications in construction.
- The Key Stage 4 curriculum also supports students by providing differentiated pathways with relevance to different groups of students. Exclusions have reduced and attendance for the targeted cohort has increased.
- Disaffected students in Year 7 are taught together in a nurture group. Effective mentoring by Year 10 students supports their literacy developments. However, the behaviour of some Year 7 students impacts negatively on their learning. Senior leaders recognise this and plan to review this provision.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included to:

- develop the subject leader's role in monitoring and evaluating the work of the department in order to raise standards
- accelerate achievement by improving the quality of teaching overall and eradicating inadequate teaching

- embed assessment for learning so that all teachers understand it and use it consistently to challenge students in their learning
- improve students' behaviour in a minority of lessons so they are ready for learning.

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