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Dear Mr Jex

Ofsted 2007-08 survey inspection programme – mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 24 and 25 September 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 formal observation of seven lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good. Standards are above average.

- Standards are above average at Key Stages 3 and 4. The latest statistics suggest that standards in the sixth form have risen markedly this year.
- The standard of students' work is good; they achieve well in lessons.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers are skilled in classroom management. Students' behaviour is good.
- Interactive whiteboards are used well to enhance learning.
- The department is staffed with well qualified mathematicians. As a team, they provide a good range of expertise and experience.
- Effective use is made of probing questions that sharpen students' responses, extend their thinking and clarify their understanding.
- Extension tasks are used in most lessons to challenge the most able.
- Most teachers use a wide variety of teaching strategies to enhance and stimulate learning. A minority of lessons, however, follow a traditional format that students find rather boring.
- Marking is regular and of good quality. Assessment is used well to improve learning and progress is tracked effectively. Students assess each other's work and make suggestions for improvement.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good with some outstanding features.

- There is excellent liaison with partner primary schools. Teachers from Horsforth deliver transition lessons to Year 6 pupils in June and July using a very well designed transition workbook that is completed in the first few weeks of Year 7. 'Maths Roadshows' are also offered to Year 5 pupils.
- The provision in Key Stages 3 and 4 is well planned to meet the needs of students of all abilities. There are separate schemes of work for each of the different levels that include links to a wide variety of electronic resources.
- A good range of GCE AS and A-level courses is offered. Further mathematics is taught in school when numbers are viable; otherwise, arrangements are made for students to gain access to other local provision. A few students who are studying AS mathematics did not take higher tier GCSE mathematics; they are supported well. Specialist short courses have been devised to help students taking other GCE AS courses with a high mathematical content, for example, psychology and physics.
- There is a very active mathematics club. Students are encouraged to submit solutions to a wide array of puzzles on display in the department.
- Students have easy access to a wide range of on-line materials which they use for revision and to consolidate their learning throughout the year. Targeted revision sessions are provided in the Easter break.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good.

- There is a very clear focus on continuous improvement.
- Effective use is made of performance data to monitor individuals' progress and that of different groups of students.
- Good quality departmental documentation includes relevant policies and a comprehensive handbook.

- Performance management makes effective use of student data, formal lesson observations and peer observations. This links to well-planned training to address any emerging weaknesses, for instance the quality of questioning, which was a weakness but is now a strength.
- The head of department and senior leaders know the team well and skilfully match the expertise of teachers to the demands of different groups. Due care and attention is paid to succession planning.
- There has been limited success in sharing the very good practice in the department. A few teachers have not fully embraced the wide range of exciting teaching and learning strategies that are being used successfully by their colleagues.

Subject issue: students' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

The majority of students enjoy their lessons which they find interesting and stimulating. They particularly enjoy quizzes and group work. There has been a big increase in the number of students choosing to study GCE AS mathematics this year and many say that they find the subject challenging and enjoyable. A small minority of students, however, find the teaching and learning in their lessons a little dull. They sometimes find that they can complete the exercises and get the correct answers but they do not really understand what they have done and why.

Inclusion

The school's approach to inclusion in mathematics is good. The department has worked hard to improve boys' performance; the gender gap is narrower in mathematics than in the school overall. Carefully planned intervention strategies support students who are falling behind. The lower ability sets are small and well staffed with a teacher and a teaching assistant. Extension tasks are prepared in most lessons to challenge the most able students, some of whom have opportunities to attend master classes at the university and a conference for potential A* GCSE candidates. Students are also encouraged to enter national mathematics challenges.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- continue to improve achievement at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form
- share the good practice within the department so that all the teaching is improved to match the quality of the best.

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