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Mr K Cornforth
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Cornforth

Ofsted 2007-08 survey inspection programme – mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 6 and 7 December 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 observation of nine lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement has improved markedly in recent years and is satisfactory. Standards are average.

- Students make good progress in most lessons.
- In 2007, students made significantly better progress in Key Stage 4 than those with similar prior attainment and made up ground lost at Key Stage 3. The achievement of Key Stage 3 students has improved in recent years and school data show that it is satisfactory.
- Achievement in the sixth form has improved this year and is good.
- Standards at Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form are around average. At GCSE, however, few students achieve GCSE grades A and A*.

- The quality of students' work is at least satisfactory and often better.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good with some outstanding features.

- The teaching team has been strengthened in recent years and includes a very good blend of expertise and experience.
- Most teachers are highly skilled, confident and creative. They try out new approaches and can adapt plans for lessons midstream in response to students' needs.
- Lessons are very well structured and teachers plan a good variety of activities. In many lessons this includes tasks of varying levels of difficulty to cater for the differing needs of students.
- Information and communications technology (ICT) is widely used. Lessons and learning are enhanced by frequent use of interactive whiteboards, laptops and the computer suite. Mathematics packages are utilised for both homework and revision.
- Students work hard and learning is good or better in most lessons.
- Teachers make excellent use of assessment to support learning. They use very good questioning techniques to extend and check on learning. Marking is very good and students are given encouragement and praise plus information on the level of their work and how it can be improved.
- Students are very good at evaluating their own learning and understanding. Peer assessment is used increasingly in lessons. Students talk knowledgeably about their target levels and the progress that they are making.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is reviewed regularly in order to match it to the needs of students. The Year 7 curriculum was changed in response to research involving the partner primary schools and funded by the specialist schools trust; an AS 'use of mathematics' course was introduced this year; and the Key Stage 4 curriculum is modified each year.
- Not all of the challenging specialist school targets for mathematics are being met.
- Liaison is very good with the five partner primary schools. Teachers from Pudsey Grangefield regularly teach Year 6 pupils, tailoring the lessons to meet the needs of the particular primary school. There is an effective exchange of information about individual students which eases transition.
- There is a good range of enrichment activities including mathematics challenges, visits to lectures and trips.
- There is a good range of intervention and booster activities that include extra revision sessions, a talk from the chief examiner, and support from learning coaches.
- The team is also developing innovative projects that involve students working on a problem for several lessons. Some projects are planned with other departments.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good.

- Performance management systems are robust and effective. They include a regular audit of books, analysis of data and interviews with students.
- There is good teamwork and effective joint planning.
- Electronic schemes of work cover the different levels and include suggested resources with useful hyperlinks.
- Target setting and monitoring are very good.
- Specialist status is well managed with regular reviews and reports to governors.

Subject issue: students' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

Students enjoy mathematics and most find lessons interesting and demanding. They participate well and appreciate the wide variety of activities in lessons. They enjoy using ICT to support their learning and to increase their understanding. Students have very good opportunities to develop their investigative skills and they enjoy working in groups to solve tough problems. They are encouraged to assess how well they understand each topic and are becoming increasingly skilled at pinpointing areas of difficulty. In lessons, students are often asked to explain concepts to each other, which they say helps them to understand.

Inclusion

Inclusion is good. There are effective intervention strategies for students who are under-performing. Lower ability students are taught in smaller groups, with an extra mathematics lesson each week for the Year 7 nurture group. The support from teaching assistants is good. The more able students are challenged well in lessons and through their involvement in enrichment activities. Students from the most vulnerable groups achieve as well as other students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raise standards and improve achievement further
- improve the quality of all teaching to match that 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