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Mr Wheale
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Dear Mr Wheale

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 23-24 January 2008 to look at work in the Secondary National Strategy.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the Secondary National Strategy, the visit had a particular focus on the impact of intervention strategies 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 National Strategy was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Students' achievement in mathematics is good. The impact of intervention strategies on students' achievement and personal development is also good.

- Students enter the school with standards which are broadly average. They make good progress, particularly in Key Stage 3, and reach standards that are above average by the end of Year 11.

- Progress is good because senior leaders carefully analyse data to identify underachieving groups and develop personalised programmes of support for them.
- A range of resources, including some from the National Strategy, support intervention and raise standards. Intervention in Year 7 has been particularly successful.
- Students enjoy their intervention groups; they build their self esteem and confidence in mathematics.

Quality of teaching and learning in mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning in mathematics is good. The impact of intervention strategies on teaching and learning is also good.

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and use questioning well to develop students' mathematical reasoning. However, the use of probing questions to challenge students is not embedded consistently in every teacher's practice.
- There is a good range of intervention programmes in mathematics which support students' learning. This includes extra numeracy classes, revision lessons on specific topics and mathematics tuition during form time for targeted students.
- Teaching assistants are specifically trained in mathematics and provide good support through questioning and behaviour management but were not utilised to teach small groups in the lessons observed.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good, as is the impact of intervention strategies in the curriculum.

- The curriculum is broad and supported by a range of activities that bring mathematics to life for students, such as the trip to Paris to study mathematics in action and programmes to develop thinking skills.
- Staff carefully plan intervention programmes for underachieving students through rigorous analysis of data.
- In Key Stage 3, good use is made of half termly assessments to identify strengths and weaknesses in students' understanding which then informs subsequent teaching. A similar system in Key Stage 4 is planned.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management in mathematics are good. The effectiveness of the leadership and management of intervention strategies is also good.

- The department is fully staffed with experienced and knowledgeable teachers. A strong culture of continuous improvement has been established by the subject leader.

- Judicious use is made of the National Strategy to develop teaching and learning and to raise standards. This has been combined with individualised intervention programmes for students. Detailed evaluation is undertaken of the impact of intervention programmes for Year 7 students however, not all intervention programmes in mathematics are evaluated with the same rigour.

Intervention strategies

The impact of intervention strategies overall is good.

- Senior leaders have made effective use of the National Strategy, combined with a wider range of resources, to raise standards. A particular strength of this strategy is the regular and detailed analysis undertaken by the intervention team which then informs solutions for individual students.

The quality of programmes for disaffected students

The quality of programmes for disaffected students is good.

- The intervention team, ably led by the deputy head, includes senior and middle leaders. It meets regularly to analyse meticulously the data provided by subject teachers for every year group. Students are very positive about their involvement in the subsequent intervention programmes.
- The intervention team considers academic achievement as well as students' attitude to learning. This enables bespoke programmes to be devised for students, which include literacy and numeracy support, mentoring by senior leaders or participation in programmes aimed at reducing disaffection.
- Senior leaders run targeted parents' evenings, with a particular emphasis on reducing students' disaffection and raising standards.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- establishing formal systems to evaluate the impact of developments in teaching and learning in mathematics
- enhancing existing systems to evaluate the impact of intervention programmes on students' outcomes.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop mathematics and intervention strategies in your 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