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15 February 2008

Mr May
Headteacher
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Dear Mr May

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 05-06 February 2008 with Usha Sahni HMI 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 in mathematics 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 part lessons.

The mathematics department is in transition in this otherwise strong school. Most of the key post holders, including the subject leader, have been appointed recently and the department has experienced considerable staffing difficulties.

The overall effectiveness of the National Strategy was judged to be satisfactory in mathematics.

Achievement and standards

Students' achievement in mathematics is satisfactory as is the impact of intervention strategies on students' achievement and personal development.

- Students' attainment on entry is above average. Standards are above average and progress is satisfactory overall.
- Students make good progress between Years 7 and 9 and satisfactory progress between Years 10 and 11. This is because there is a coherent and systematic programme of assessment and intervention in place.
- The Key Stage 3 programme of study has been condensed: students will be entered for national tests at the end of Year 8. In lessons the impact of this can be seen in greater challenge for students and a more rapid pace of learning.
- Behaviour is good.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Good teaching in the department is exemplified by high expectations, well paced lessons and opportunities for students to articulate their mathematical reasoning.
- Information about students' strength and weaknesses is used to inform intervention, but this is not systematic and a departmental overview is not in place.

Quality of curriculum

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

- The two year Key Stage 3 programme is enthusing students and raising expectations of both students and teachers. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is flexible and varied helping students to engage in their learning. Additional support is available for those who need it through focussed revision lessons.
- National Strategy resources have been integrated into the scheme of work and contribute to the good progress students make in Key Stage 3. In Key Stage 4 intervention plans lack precision and their impact is unclear.

Leadership and management

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

- The intervention strategy at whole school level is clearly thought out, personalised to individual students and its impact evaluated.
- The strong, coherent and systematic cycle of monitoring and evaluation identifies underachieving or vulnerable students.
- The new subject leader has begun the process of embedding strong whole school systems in mathematics. It does not fully analyse the impact of developments on key groups of students such as those with learning difficulties or vulnerable students.
- Action is being taken by the subject leader to reduce inconsistencies in teachers' practice.

Intervention strategies

The impact of intervention strategies overall in the mathematics department is satisfactory.

- Strong systems exist in Key Stage 3. In Key Stage 4 whole school intervention systems have had a positive impact in minimising the impact of teacher vacancies, but there is a lack of consistency across the work of the department which senior leaders are addressing.

The quality of programmes for disaffected students

The quality of programmes for disaffected pupils is good.

- Detailed analysis of data and good systems for monitoring the work of the schools provide senior leaders with information which enable personalised intervention for students.
- There is a wide range of support available to students to improve their achievement.
- Effective monitoring enables staff to evaluate the impact of the support they provide on students' attitudes and achievement. The intervention programmes focus on prevention and have had a beneficial impact on students.
- Innovative programmes such as training students to control their emotions through understanding their physiology is having a very positive impact on students, enabling them to manage their behaviour and focus on learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the quality of teaching and learning in the department so it is consistently good
- developing rigour in monitoring and evaluating to ensure consistency in good practice in the department
- ensuring students are fully informed about developments in mathematics and their role in shaping improvements.

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