

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@Ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Ms Oliver-Watkins
Headteacher
Chichester High School for Girls
Kingsham Road
Chichester
West Sussex
PO19 8EB

Dear Ms Oliver-Watkins

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 04 and 05 March 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 National Strategies, 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 lessons. The mathematics faculty has experienced significant difficulty in recruiting teachers recently.

The overall effectiveness of the National Strategies was judged to be inadequate in mathematics.

Achievement and standards in mathematics

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

- Students' attainment on entry to the school is slightly above average. Standards fell in 2007, both at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, and are now broadly average.
- Although some students, particularly the more able, make good progress, a significant number do not make satisfactory progress. Given students' starting points, their achievement overall between Years 7 and 11 is inadequate.
- The school maintains detailed intervention plans in an attempt to redress the decline in standards. However, the mathematics faculty's current analysis shows that the number of students meeting the targets set for them is well below expectation.
- Progress in a significant number of lessons is inadequate; a key factor that contributes to this is students' disengagement and lack of motivation, which teachers do not challenge sufficiently.

Quality of teaching and learning in mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning is inadequate overall. However, the impact of intervention strategies on teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- In half of the lessons observed teaching was good. However, teaching and learning are inadequate overall because in too many other lessons teachers' expectations were too low and students were not motivated to learn.
- Teachers do not always use the available assessment data to set work that matches the needs of all students in lessons.
- There is too much variability in teachers' practice and not all students are aware of their curriculum targets or know how to improve their standard of work.
- Intervention programmes in mathematics are effective.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is inadequate. The impact of intervention strategies in the curriculum is satisfactory.

- In Key Stage 3, the curriculum is enhanced by National Strategy resources and has regular and systematic assessment opportunities. In Key Stage 4 the curriculum is not as well structured.
- Intervention programmes enhance the learning of targeted students. However, students who are not involved in these programmes would

welcome additional support outside of lessons and feel that not enough time is given to topics to ensure they have sufficient understanding.

- Although a few teachers make good use of resources, for example, online teaching resources, in too many lessons insufficient use is made of them to improve students' understanding of mathematics.

Leadership and management

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

- There are inconsistencies in practice across the work of the department and self-evaluation has not been precise in identifying priorities for improvement in mathematics.
- Low level disruption is acknowledged to be a key issue but it has not been addressed with sufficient rigour.
- There has been significant difficulty in recruiting staff and some teaching groups have to be shared between teachers.
- Good use is made of data to identify students for intervention but the use of assessment data is not embedded in teachers' planning overall.

Intervention strategies

The impact of intervention strategies overall is satisfactory.

- There is a clear and coherent intervention plan.
- The progress of targeted students is monitored regularly.
- The intervention programme is effective for the targeted cohort but has not had sufficient impact on students' learning or engagement in whole class lessons.

The quality of programmes for disaffected students

The quality of programmes for disaffected students is satisfactory.

- Detailed and regular analysis of students' progress data is undertaken which effectively informs students' support.
- Evaluation of the impact of support on students' wider outcomes, such as on exclusions and attendance, is good. In mathematics lessons, not enough has been done to challenge disaffection and raise expectation.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards and achievement in mathematics by ensuring that data is used to inform planning so that teaching challenges all learners
- improving teaching so that it is consistently good and promotes good behaviour for learning

- making use of monitoring and evaluation systems to identify and address precise areas for improvement.

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