

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr Richard Williams  
Headteacher  
Wrockwardine Wood Arts College  
New Road  
Wrockwardine Wood  
Telford and Wrekin  
TF2 6JZ

Dear Mr Williams

Ofsted 2007-08 survey inspection programme – mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 21 and 22 January 2008 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 seven lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Standards are below average; achievement is inadequate.

- Standards and achievement at GCSE and at Key Stage 3 have been low for several years. Students make poor progress in mathematics whilst in the school.
- More able students achieve broadly in line with expectation in GCSE examinations but less able students achieve poorly. In 2007, 34% of students achieved a higher level GCSE pass, which is a higher proportion than in previous years, and the school anticipates further improvement in 2008 as it builds upon last year's experiences of trialling 'functional mathematics' and

'additional mathematics' qualifications, coupled with targeted intervention on key groups of students. The school is demonstrating some capacity for improvement but the focus needs to be on improving and sustaining students' rate of progress rather than on late intervention.

- Results of Key Stage 3 tests show that the majority of students make poor progress in their early years within the school.
- Progress in lessons is variable. It can be good when teaching engages and challenges students. Too often, however, lessons are undemanding and students are not motivated or engaged in their learning.
- Students say they enjoy mathematics when they are in certain groups but find it dull and boring in others. Often they are prevented from learning by the silly behaviour of other students.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is inadequate.

- When teaching and learning are good, lessons are pacy, challenging and motivating. Students behave well and are fully engaged in their learning. However, too often, lessons lack purpose, expectations of students' work and behaviour are too low, activities are about completing exercises rather than developing understanding, and students either become lethargic or misbehave.
- The recently introduced support for teaching has started to improve the quality of learning but, as yet, it is not embedded and has not had an impact upon all staff within the department.
- Assessment is weak. All lessons have learning objectives but these are rarely effectively shared with students or used to help consolidate learning. Work is not always well matched to the ability of students. Marking sometimes offers advice on how to improve but this is not consistent across all groups. It does not inform students about the level at which they are working or how they are progressing towards their target grades. Too often, poor work in books is not challenged.

### Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Good use is made of different pathways towards GCSE including pilot courses in 'functional mathematics' and 'additional mathematics'. A group of more able Year 9 students who completed their Key Stage 3 tests a year early are entered for GCSE statistics in 2008.
- Additional support is provided for numeracy in Years 7 and 8 but places too much emphasis on calculation out of context rather than interesting activities that allow students to apply their skills.
- Intervention work for grade C/D borderline GCSE students, including Saturday and Easter classes, and additional support for high attaining groups has helped raise standards.
- Schemes of work are based upon published texts and cover appropriate work but lack sufficient advice on how to teach each topic, on incorporating using

and applying mathematics, and on how information communication technology can be used to enhance learning.

## Leadership and management

Leadership and management are inadequate.

- Severe staffing difficulties have significantly impeded the effectiveness of subject leadership. Staff have not been held to account for their work to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and raise standards. Responsibilities within the department have not been updated to respond to developments hence the subject leader has not always been well supported.
- New staff to the school are well supported.
- There are plans in place to improve mathematics but these need to focus on building sustainable improvements in the quality of teaching, and capitalise upon support already available.

Subject issue: students' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

Students have limited enjoyment within mathematics; they feel that the work is often uninteresting and lacks relevance. They say that when teaching focuses upon understanding as well as mathematical content and techniques, they work better and enjoy the subject more, but this is not the case in many lessons.

## Inclusion

Inclusion is satisfactory. The school is working hard to ensure all students have greater opportunities to succeed. As yet, while strategies have had limited impact upon outcomes, the different courses at GCSE, targeted intervention for identified underachieving students, and support for numeracy mean achievement is starting to improve, albeit from a low baseline.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising achievement in mathematics by ensuring all students are suitably challenged in their work
- improving the quality of teaching so that all students make good progress in lessons
- ensuring schemes of work support teaching by including a good range of interesting activities which motivate students and improve their understanding of mathematical concepts
- enhancing the leadership of the department so that staff are challenged and supported to deliver effective lessons.

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

Michael Smith  
Her Majesty's Inspector