

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr A Hamilton  
Headteacher  
Bartholomew School  
Witney Road  
Eynsham  
Oxfordshire  
OX29 4AP

Dear Mr Hamilton

Ofsted 2007-08 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 31 March and 01 April 2008 to look at work in mathematics.

As outlined in our initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the effectiveness of the school's approaches to improving the quality of teaching and learning in 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. 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 five lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement in mathematics is good and standards are well above average.

- Standards are rising year-by-year. The proportion of students gaining the highest GCSE A\* and A grades in 2007 was above that expected nationally.
- Mathematics has exceeded its specialist technology college targets.
- All groups of students achieve at least satisfactorily by Year 9 and by Year 11 most achieve well. Students make faster progress in mathematics during GCSE courses than in Key Stage 3. Boys and girls make equally good progress from their starting points by the end of Year 11.

- Post-16 students make good progress to achieve above average standards at A level. High numbers now take mathematics in the sixth form. The majority complete AS courses and continue on to A level.
- Progress in lessons seen and in students' work is currently good.
- Attitudes to learning mathematics are generally positive although too few students are concerned to present work carefully.

### Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is good.

- Teaching in mathematics is knowledgeable and purposeful. Lesson content is well structured and most lessons are characterised by a brisk pace. Students are generally well motivated, pay good attention to tasks and know what is expected of them. Teachers have good professional relationships with their classes.
- Students and teachers know from test analysis the areas of mathematics in which students have performed well. They understand this performance in relation to national standards. Not all mathematics staff, however, check students' understanding of work in lessons systematically enough to ensure that they grasp each step.
- There is good use of information and communication (ICT) resources to demonstrate and model concepts in mathematics. This encourages students' engagement in lessons as does teachers' attention to students' oral responses to questions.
- Students' notebooks are unsatisfactory records of their work in class because teachers concentrate their diagnostic marking on unit tests and pay too little attention to other written work.

### Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is good.

- The recently rewritten scheme of work provides good guidance to staff on how to structure topics. ICT resources are well integrated as is using and applying mathematics..
- Students benefit from enrichment opportunities in clubs and from out-of-hours clinics and revision sessions to support understanding.
- Post-16 students have opportunities to study A-level further mathematics. Given the growing numbers of A-level students, the sixth-form curriculum lacks the flexibility to provide students with units of their choice.
- Inadequacies in the building hinder the effective use of displays to illustrate the application of mathematics across the curriculum.

### Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- The mathematics subject leader has an exceptionally clear vision of how to achieve improvements in mathematics.
- There is very good in-house professional development to support the mathematics team.

- The impact of mathematics within the technology specialism is strong both within school and with the partner primaries.
- The monitoring and evaluation of the work of the department by the line manager and by the subject leader are robust. However, teachers would benefit from greater guidance on day-to-day assessments and record keeping of students' learning.
- Senior leaders support the department very well and have an accurate evaluation of the overall quality of the mathematics provision.

Subject issue: the effectiveness of the school's approaches to improving the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics

The subject leader has used regular in-house professional development opportunities very well to realign the mathematics team's understanding of what the students should achieve. Through these activities, the mathematics curriculum has been restructured so that teachers are very clear as to what students must understand and do. This has been particularly successful and has resulted in significant rises in students' performance over the last two years. Effective training by a post-threshold member of staff on the interactive use of ICT resources has also had a very positive impact on classroom practice.

#### Inclusion

Inclusion in mathematics is good.

Setting is regularly reviewed to ensure students receive appropriate help in preparing for tests and examinations. The department is striving to find ways to support the minority of Year 11 students who do not achieve grade C or better in GCSE examinations. Close monitoring of target groups and careful identification of those at risk of underachievement lead to good quality support. This increases students' self-esteem, which in turn, raises performance.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- develop teachers' expertise in checking students' understanding of planned work in lessons
- ensure teachers and students pay more attention to the quality of students' written work
- provide greater flexibility in the course options offered to post-16 students.

As explained in our previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Sheila Nolan  
Additional Inspector