

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

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



21 December 2009

Mr A Conner  
Headteacher  
Honley High School  
Station Road  
Honley  
Holmfirth  
HD9 6QJ

Dear Mr Connor

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 7 and 8 December 2009 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of 10 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the subject is good.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is outstanding.

- Attainment has been consistently well above average for the last three years. Students join the school having reached standards in national Key Stage 2 tests that are a little above average. They make good progress in mathematics to reach significantly above average standards. Nearly three-quarters attain A\* to C grades at GCSE and almost all gain a mathematical qualification.
- A group of able Year 10 students who studied GCSE statistics in after-school lessons reached high standards. The school participates in pilot

qualifications, GCSE additional mathematics and functional skills at Levels 1 and 2. Year 11 students attained well in additional mathematics but the functional skills examination proved too demanding for many Year 9 students.

- The quality of learning is good. Students work hard in partnership with teachers to acquire the knowledge and skills that equip them for their GCSE examinations. They appreciate the help and support the teachers provide so readily.
- Students' behaviour was good in all the lessons observed; their positive attitudes contribute significantly to their achievement. Students are attentive and conscientious, whether working individually or, as they enjoy doing, in pairs and groups when they have opportunities for talking about mathematics.

### Quality of teaching of mathematics

The quality of teaching of mathematics is good.

- Most of the teaching is good. Some has outstanding features and a minority is satisfactory. Teachers are well organised and plan lessons carefully. Most use their subject knowledge effectively in questioning and in modelling techniques, and pay good attention to correct mathematical language and presentation. They have high expectations of students' work rate, and circulate to check on students' progress, providing effective individual support.
- In the best lessons, teachers provide a high level of challenge, build skilfully on students' responses, and give good opportunities for students to discuss their ideas and reason mathematically. Practical activities help secure students' conceptual understanding.
- Relative weaknesses in the teaching tend to be mathematical rather than generic. Teachers do not always anticipate potential misconceptions, use mathematical language precisely, or show enough clarity on how planned activities and approaches secure progression in learning.
- Teaching assistants often provide good support for students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities during individual and group work but their expertise is not always exploited to greatest effect during whole-class teaching.
- Teachers' use of assessment supports learning well. Mini-whiteboards ensure all are involved and help teachers check on students' understanding. While much marking helpfully pinpoints errors and indicates the way forward, some does not distinguish between misunderstanding and slips in accuracy.
- The department is working thoughtfully on ways to enhance assessment of students' attainment and progress through the 'Assessing Pupils' Progress' initiative, and on involving students in self-assessment. Sensibly, this is being developed in conjunction with work on new schemes of work.

## Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is good.

- The department is reflective about the curriculum and qualifications it provides, keeping up-to-date with national changes and developments. The range of GCSEs and entry-level qualifications meets students' needs well at Key Stage 4.
- Key Stage 3 schemes of work are being reviewed to increase the emphasis on the key process skills. Tasks, some cross-curricular, used with Year 9 last summer, such as designing and flying a kite and making a solar-powered car, showed insight into the type of rich real-life applications that are enjoyable and promote students' functional skills. There is scope to use such tasks to develop the key skills process systematically, and monitor students' progress in them.
- While teachers work closely together, sharing ideas and approaches to teaching topics, this expertise is not captured in guidance for all staff to ensure that the development of students' conceptual understanding is promoted consistently. Although some teachers make good use of practical equipment, information and communication technology (ICT) is rarely used as a tool for learning mathematics.
- The school houses a local authority centre for autistic students. These students study mathematics alongside their peers, and are supported well by teaching assistants. They make good progress in their personal development as well as mathematically, learning to work independently and in small groups.

## Effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of mathematics is good.

- The mathematics department is rightly well regarded by senior staff and the local authority. The head of department leads by example in the classroom and inspires commitment and enthusiasm from her team of staff. There is a very good collaborative approach to day-to-day practice and curriculum development. The department is organised well; systems run smoothly.
- Arrangements for line management, departmental meetings, and management activities, such as monitoring and evaluation, are conducted in line with the school's policies and expectations. Close working relationships and a good level of professional dialogue mean the head of department has an accurate view of the quality of the department's work. Regular monitoring has the potential to embed new initiatives more securely and rapidly and iron out any inconsistencies.
- Departmental self-evaluation also follows the school's model and is conducted in stages over the academic year. The section on students' achievement is accurate and identifies priorities, although links with teaching and the curriculum are not made. The subject development plan

has some weaknesses that do not aid its effective implementation. Actions are not always sharply defined or success criteria quantified, and arrangements for monitoring and evaluation lack rigour.

- Examination results and assessment data are analysed well and students' progress is monitored. The department has begun to scrutinise the performance of groups of students to check for any unevenness, for instance the progress of students of minority ethnic heritage.

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

- Approaches to developing teaching are based on the department's collaborative and supportive ethos. There is scope to strengthen this through regular inputs at departmental meetings.
- Records of lesson observations lack detail of students' gains in knowledge, skills and understanding of mathematics and on subject-specific pedagogy. The head of department's judgements following a joint observation showed a good grasp of the features of the teaching.
- The school is supporting a non-specialist teacher on the Mathematics Development Programme to enhance her subject expertise.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- continuing work already started on developing the schemes of work to ensure:
  - problem-solving is incorporated throughout all units
  - students' skills in using and applying mathematics are developed explicitly
  - guidance for teachers is provided on approaches that promote conceptual understanding
  - opportunities for use of ICT by students are identified
- improving the quality of development planning and sharpening arrangements for monitoring and evaluation.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop mathematics in the school.

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

Jane Jones  
Her Majesty's Inspector