

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



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Ms K Bastick-Styles
Headteacher
Sedgehill School
Sedgehill Road
London
SE6 3QW

Dear Ms Bastick-Styles

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: physical education (PE) and mathematics.

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during our visit on 12 and 13 January 2010 to look at work in PE and mathematics.

As outlined in the initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subjects, the visit had a particular focus on the identification of an area of best practice in PE and its impact for students, and 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 you and your deputy headteacher, the subject leaders, teachers and groups of students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and the observation of seven PE and 10 mathematics lessons.

Physical Education

The overall effectiveness of PE is satisfactory.

Achievement in PE

Achievement is satisfactory.

- Over the past two years, standards in Key Stage 3 have risen to above the national average. In 2009, more than half of all Year 9 students exceeded expectations and attained the highest levels. In Key Stage 4, GCSE results fell slightly in 2009 but remained above national averages, particularly the proportion of students attaining A* and A grades which is very high.

- Progress made in core PE lessons is less pronounced, particularly in some Year 11 classes. These students have experienced some discontinuity in their learning during the move to new facilities and have not maintained their regular participation in lessons. Although standards are broadly satisfactory, not all students achieve what they are capable of in lessons. In the sixth form, monitoring data show that the majority of students following the BTEC National Diploma in sport are on track to meet the challenging targets set for them.

Quality of teaching in PE

The quality of teaching in PE is good.

- In most lessons teaching is organised well, behaviour is managed effectively and teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan activities that challenge students to work hard. Good pace and extended time for students to practise help them to consolidate their learning. Most teaching effectively plans opportunities for students to assess how well they and others are performing. A particular strength is the way in which information and communication technology, particularly video, is used in practical lessons to illustrate learning. This helps to capture students' interest and strengthen their understanding of the skills and techniques they are expected to learn.
- Students enjoy PE and respond positively to their teachers. Those in Key Stage 3 know what their targets are and what they need to do to meet them. Students' achievement in GCSE and BTEC theory lessons has risen due to better quality teaching resources and improved procedures to monitor their progress. In a small but significant minority of lessons in Key Stage 4, teachers' expectations of students' behaviour and what they are capable of achieving are not sufficiently high.

Quality of the curriculum in PE

The quality of the PE curriculum is satisfactory.

- First-class facilities allow students to experience a wide range of games, gymnastics, fitness and athletic activities. In addition, students in Key Stage 3 are taught dance by a specialist teacher as part of their performing arts entitlement which complements their experiences in PE. Students in Years 7 to 9 benefit from two hours of PE each week, taught in single gender groups of students of similar abilities. Students say that this helps them to make friends, enjoy lessons and meet their targets. This year, a small proportion of students in Year 9 have an additional lesson to learn to become junior sports leaders.
- Students in Years 10 and 11 receive fewer than two hours of PE each week but, as all new facilities become available for use, this will be extended to two hours from September this year. The quality of provision is not consistent across all classes in Year 11 because the high expectations seen in the majority of lessons are not applied by all staff.

Students participate in a satisfactory range of enrichment activities and a small but increasing number of students in Key Stage 4 qualify as junior sports leaders and support local community sports events. The school is working effectively with its local sports partnership to increase the number of after-school clubs delivered by external sports coaches.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in PE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in PE is good.

- The subject leader, ably supported by experienced and enthusiastic colleagues, has had a direct impact on raising achievement in PE. His leadership has moved the department from one that was underperforming to one that is much more effective and has good capacity to secure further improvements. There is now much greater rigour to monitoring the work of the department. Self-evaluation is largely accurate and shows a good understanding of what else needs to be done.
- New staff and ongoing training have led to better quality teaching and learning and increased opportunities for students' participation and engagement. These improvements have not had sufficient time to impact fully on improved outcomes for all students in Key Stage 4. Some progress has been made in implementing the new programme of study for PE but this is not yet mapped across all existing schemes of work and does not link to procedures for assessment.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- resolving the inconsistencies in teaching and in provision so that all students in Key Stage 4 engage fully in lessons and make the progress expected of them
- ensuring that all new curriculum requirements for PE are firmly embedded into departmental planning and assessment procedures across both key stages.

Mathematics

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is inadequate.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is inadequate.

- For the last three years, the average attainment in GCSE mathematics has been well below national expectations. In each case, the cohort of approximately 270 students has split into two groups: a majority who obtain at least the minimum grade G in GCSE mathematics and a minority of about 20 students who do not. The proportion failing to pass GCSE is more than three times the national figure. Persistently low standards, coupled with little evidence of improvement, mean that achievement is inadequate overall. While learning and progress have been satisfactory for

students in the majority group, they have been poor for those in the minority group, many of whom have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

- Progress is currently satisfactory in Key Stage 3. The main cause of underachievement in the minority group has been a significant disruption of their mathematics lessons during Key Stage 4, caused either by their involvement in alternative education programmes, which cut across the timetabled mathematics lessons, or by their poor attendance. While most students have positive attitudes to mathematics, a significant number become disenchanted and lose their motivation in Key Stage 4.
- The school has been successful in raising the attainment of the most able students and this is encouraging greater participation post-16. A greater focus on understanding mathematical principles has given these students a better preparation for A-level study.

Quality of teaching of mathematics

The quality of teaching of mathematics is satisfactory.

- Teaching was good in half of the lessons observed. Students made good progress because activities were designed to help students develop their understanding. For example, a teacher used a visual representation of place value to help Year 8 students understand the effect of multiplying or dividing by 10 and 100. He and the two other adults in the classroom consistently reinforced the visual model with students who needed their help. In a Year 7 combined science/mathematics lesson, students plotted graphs to represent the changing populations of lynx and their prey. The context helped them to interpret their graphs intelligently.
- In the other lessons, the pace of learning was slower and in some cases inadequate. The teachers explained work accurately, but spent too long doing so. Some of the whole-class work engaged students one at a time, for example taking turns to play a game on the interactive whiteboard, rather than involving all by playing the game in small groups.
- Most teachers had a good rapport with their classes. This was particularly evident in an all-girl Year 10 class, which has been set up to help build girls' confidence in mathematics. In a few cases, the teachers' expectations were too low. They set tasks that were too easy and gave students too long to do them. In these classes, the better motivated students were left with nothing to do once they had finished the tasks.
- The quality of assessment was variable, ranging from accurate marking, with comments to show students how to improve, to cases where incorrect work had simply been ticked. The departmental policy sets out a formulaic approach to deciding a National Curriculum level for each sequence of exercises. This practice does not give an accurate picture of students' attainment.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- The schemes of work provide a basic framework for teachers, indicating the order of topics and the associated learning objectives. Students have some opportunities to use and apply mathematics in context or to investigate mathematical situations. However, the schemes provide little guidance for teachers about the most fruitful teaching approaches or on how to make links with other areas of mathematics.
- Students have some opportunities to use computer learning packages and to complete homework online, but the extent varies from class to class. The department is introducing some promising innovations, such as an all-girl teaching group in Year 10 and early entry to GCSE for students who are in danger of losing their motivation in Year 11. The consortium arrangements in the sixth form ensure that suitably qualified students can study further mathematics at A level.
- The Year 7 'baccalaureate' programme is helping students to learn more mathematics in context. The school is now tackling the problems caused by alternative curriculum programmes disrupting the flow of mathematics lessons for some students in Key Stage 4.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics

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

- There is a clear recognition of the need to make improvements in mathematics. In the short term, careful monitoring of students' progress is used to target support for individual students in Year 11. However, senior leaders and the head of department also recognise the need for a sustained development programme to improve mathematics over a period of several years.
- Senior leaders have demonstrated their capacity to effect improvements in other areas of the school, but the recent track record indicates that the capacity to make improvements in mathematics is less strong, though satisfactory. Departmental self-evaluation is accurate and teachers get useful feedback from lesson observations. However, there is scope for this to be more subject-specific.

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

- Although some teachers are relatively inexperienced and still developing their skills, the teaching team is now more stable than for several years. Teachers are willing to share ideas and learn from each other. Consequently, the department is now in a position to focus collectively on improving provision in mathematics.

- The school values the support it receives from the local authority and makes effective use of other agencies and partnerships to support teachers' development.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising overall standards in mathematics by:
 - improving the quality and consistency of teaching and assessment for all students so that they make faster progress
 - ensuring that every student achieves a mathematical qualification by the end of Year 11
 - enhancing the schemes of work by working as a departmental team to develop and record preferred approaches to teaching particular topics
 - ensuring that feedback after observations includes an appropriate focus on how well the lesson promotes mathematical understanding.

We hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop PE and 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

John Mitcheson
Stephen Abbott
Her Majesty's Inspectors