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Dear Mr Firman

Ofsted survey inspection programme – mathematics and citizenship

Thank you for the hospitality and co-operation offered by you and your staff, during the visit of myself and my colleague, Judith Straw, Additional Inspector, on 26 and 27 March 2007 to look at work in mathematics and citizenship.

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.

Mathematics

Inspection activities included a focus upon students' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and the observation of seven lessons and short visits to others.

The inspection focused principally on mathematics in Years 7 to 11.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Students join the school having achieved average standards in tests at primary school and make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 3. In 2005 and 2006, they attained broadly average standards in national tests. Slightly fewer students

gained Level 5 or above in 2006, but this reflected their marginally lower attainment on entry to the school

- At GCSE in 2006, students gained broadly average standards; they had made satisfactory progress in mathematics during their five years in school. The percentage of students gaining A* to C grades was in line with the 2005 figure.
- In lessons, standards overall were broadly average with satisfactory progress being made by most students.
- Students' personal development in mathematics lessons is satisfactory. Most students behave appropriately though low-level disruption is an issue in a few lessons.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are satisfactory.

- Teachers have a sound understanding of mathematics and, generally, a positive rapport with students, resulting in a satisfactory pace of learning in most lessons. However, there is a need in some lessons for the repertoire of teaching and learning approaches used to engage students to be broadened and for best practice to be shared.
- Regular assessments mean teachers know how well students are doing. However, best use of this information is not always made to ensure each student receives the appropriate level of challenge. Whilst some students know their current and target levels or grades, the varying quality of written feedback on their work means they are less clear on how to improve.
- The use of homework and recap sessions in lessons is not sufficiently consistent to consolidate or help extend students' learning.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- All students in Year 11 are entered for GCSE mathematics. However, the faculty recognises the need to make alternative provision for a few of the lower-ability students for whom this may not be the appropriate accreditation.
- In Years 7 to 9, opportunities are not sufficiently developed for students to use and apply mathematics. The head of faculty has again recognised the need to develop this as an integral feature of teaching and learning.
- Students have opportunities to get involved in extra-curricular activities including a mathematics club and revision sessions to enhance their learning.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- After a considerable period of staffing turbulence, which impeded the progress of the faculty, relative teaching stability has now been gained. A team spirit towards raising standards has now developed under the clear leadership of the head of

faculty. However, there still remains the need to share good practice and address the weaker teaching in order that students' achievement and behaviour are improved.

- Whilst self-evaluation of the mathematics provision contributes to an appropriate action plan, the monitoring functions in the department are not sufficiently rigorous. For example, whilst teaching is monitored regularly, it focuses insufficiently on the progress made by students.
- Schemes of work are available but they are not sufficiently developed to fully support teaching.

Subject issue: students' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

Students are developing a satisfactory understanding of mathematics. The more able can explain the connections between the various areas of mathematics. They understand how to draw on their previous learning to help solve problems such as those involving estimation by using their knowledge of area, ratio and proportion. Lower ability students are only beginning to make such links.

Students say they get most enjoyment of their lessons when they are involved in practical activities. They say they get least enjoyment when too much of their time is spent working through textbook questions or when the teacher does not explain the work clearly enough. Students in a few classes cite that the weaker attitude to learning of a minority of their peers is a barrier to their understanding and enjoyment of mathematics.

Inclusion

Inclusion is satisfactory. Overall students make satisfactory progress. However, the faculty identifies the need to ensure middle ability girls in Key Stage 3 and the higher ability in Key Stage 4 are supported sufficiently to achieve their potential. Teachers' lesson planning does not allow for the needs of different groups of students within a class; in practice, most do the same work. Not all students have the opportunity to use information communication technology (ICT) to develop their learning.

Whilst older students' attainment is monitored through regular assessments, there is less clarity on the progress students make in Years 7 and 8 towards their targets.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raise the quality of teaching and learning to engage students more fully and meet their different learning needs. Ensure low-level disruption is dealt with appropriately
- improve the quality of written feedback that students receive on their work in order that they know how to improve and achievement may be raised
- improve the rigour of the monitoring functions in the department.

Citizenship

Inspection activities focused upon the provision for teaching and learning about Britain's diversity.

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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness was judged to be satisfactory with some strengths.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in citizenship are satisfactory.

- Students demonstrate good understanding of some aspects of the citizenship curriculum but their knowledge is partial and incomplete because not enough time is given to the discrete citizenship course.
- Assessment is still at an early stage with the result that students do not know how well they are doing in citizenship.
- In lessons, students discuss and debate a wide range of issues and use ICT effectively so that they have well-developed skills of enquiry and communication. However, students are not always made aware of the citizenship elements in other subjects and cannot identify how well they are doing.
- The school council is effective and provides a platform for students to make an impact on the development of the school.
- Students take part in numerous local initiatives such as the Lache project, managing part of the school's website, a wide range of community services and the new and impressive ECO-committee.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Across the curriculum, teachers demonstrate good knowledge but do not always identify citizenship elements within their subject areas.
- Teachers create plenty of opportunities for students to use ICT for research and presentation. They manage discussions on topical and controversial topics effectively and with sensitivity.
- Some teaching lacks pace and challenge, and work is not differentiated for individual students. As a result the behaviour of some students deteriorates.
- Assessment is inconsistent across the different aspects of citizenship. Work in Key Stage 3 humanities subjects is marked well and according to citizenship criteria. In Key Stage 4, students' work is marked and assessed as religious education and not as citizenship. Students' work in discrete personal, social, citizenship, health education (PSCHE) is rarely marked or assessed.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Locating citizenship within the PSCE programme means that less than 50% of the time available is given to citizenship. The curriculum lacks depth and breadth and there is no scope for re-visiting topics.
- In Key Stage 3, several subjects make a significant contribution to students' knowledge and understanding of citizenship. There is good practice in history, geography and religious education where substantial projects are clearly taught as citizenship units. Elsewhere, though, students are less clear about which units of work contain citizenship elements.
- In Key Stage 4, the curriculum is delivered through religious education which all students study. Again, though, teachers do not always clearly identify where citizenship elements exist and they do not assess citizenship.
- Opportunities for students to participate in citizenship-related activities are good and annual activity days enhance provision.

Leadership and management of citizenship

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- A new team took over the management of citizenship last September. An effective audit has identified strengths and weaknesses and self analysis appears to be shrewd and accurate. There is a clear vision of what needs to be done and how to go about it.
- Senior management has given full backing to the subject co-ordinators to develop citizenship so that it better meets statutory requirements.

Subject issue: provision for teaching and learning about Britain's diversity

Students learn about migration and the development of multi-cultural cities in geography; they look at the beliefs and customs of other faiths in religious education as well as the causes and effects of racism. An excellent unit on the development of Britain's cultural diversity is taught within Year 10 history but not all students follow this course. The school has no planned programme of study in this area so that the opportunities for students to develop greater understanding of multi-cultural Britain are limited.

Inclusion

Teachers plan satisfactorily for the range of students they teach in some subjects across the curriculum but this is not the case in PSCE lessons. There is little evidence of differentiation other than by outcome in many of these lessons. Access to some parts of the citizenship curriculum in Key Stage 4 is limited because of the different choices students make. All students are able to engage in a wide range of community activities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to develop assessment in citizenship
- to co-ordinate the curriculum more effectively so that students know precisely when they are covering citizenship topics in other subjects and how well they are doing
- to monitor the delivery of citizenship across PSHCE and the range of host subjects.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop citizenship and 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

Mark Wilson
Additional Inspector