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Mr Nick Binder  
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Dear Mr Binder

Ofsted 2006-07 survey inspection programme – mathematics and citizenship

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit with my colleague Barbara Hilton, Additional Inspector, on 5 and 6 March 2007 to look at work in mathematics and citizenship. As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subjects, the visit had a particular focus on students' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics and the provision within citizenship concerned with Britain's diversity.

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 made included: interviews with students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons and other activities.

### Mathematics

The overall effectiveness of mathematics was judged to be satisfactory.

#### Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Students are currently making satisfactory progress to reach broadly average standards in Key Stages 3 and 4.

- Some students' progress in the recent past was affected by frequent changes in staff. There was a particularly good set of GCSE results in 2006 for groups of students who benefited from consistent and strong teaching.
- Students with learning difficulties and disabilities receive appropriate support that enables them to make satisfactory progress.
- No students studied advanced level mathematics last year. This year the AS level group is reaching broadly average standards. They work well together to help each other with solutions.
- Most students readily settle down to work but do not show initiative. Many enjoy mathematics but some create low-level disruption to lessons.

### Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are satisfactory.

- Teachers have good professional relationships with students and take account of some of their strengths and weaknesses in lessons.
- Students follow the methods they are given and produce correct work but do not understand it well enough.
- There is room for a sharper focus on each student's progress. Sometimes the work is too easy or too hard for some of them, or there is insufficient checking of their understanding during the lesson to help them do as well as they could. On some occasions, teaching does not ensure that all students are listening or involved in responding.
- Students know the areas they have not performed well on in tests and are given related targets in their full reports. They are not sufficiently involved in assessing their own progress against national standards or in lessons, and are not given clear enough guidance about what they need to do to improve.
- Teaching uses some well-chosen activities that have the potential to encourage students to think but they are not consistently delivered effectively enough to enable students to make good progress.
- Teaching assistants provide sound support in lessons and teach small groups effectively.

### Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- Schemes of work are based on textbooks which offer appropriate levels of work for different groups. They do not ensure students' entitlement to the full range of hands-on use of information and communication technology within mathematics or full breadth of opportunities to use and apply mathematics. Consequently, some students have more of these opportunities than others.
- The revision classes and additional support provided for students approaching national assessments are well attended.
- Students have access to an online revision programme and some groups use it during lesson time.

- Small teaching groups have been formed to meet the needs of the lowest attainers but the timetable imposes some constraints on placing students in the most appropriate teaching group.

## Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- The new team of mathematics teachers and teaching assistants, formed within the last year, is committed to raising standards and works together effectively.
- The head of department has produced a sound action plan for improvements in key areas, although success criteria are not based closely enough on the impact of actions. He has introduced useful changes, but building on previous provision and making improvements have been slow mainly because organisation and management are not efficient. Greater emphasis on prioritisation, consistency and entitlement is needed.
- Sound evaluation of students' attainment has identified where revision and technology may help, but has not been sufficiently perceptive to inform improvements that could be made in teaching across all year groups.
- Assessment is used soundly to identify individual students who are offered additional support prior to national assessments, but central systems do not automatically highlight frequently enough all of the students in each year group who are making less than expected progress.
- Monitoring and evaluation by senior management has led to an accurate view of overall mathematics provision and improvements being made in it. Nevertheless, evaluation of lessons is not based strongly enough on students' progress, and is consequently sometimes generous.

## Subject issue: students' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

Students enjoy practical activities, individual revision work they do online and opportunities to show their solutions on the board, but they do not all have similar access to these activities. Sometimes topics are introduced in ways that help students to understand why a method works but, too often, students are provided with rules to follow or the questions are broken down into stages so that they do not develop independent problem solving skills.

## Inclusion

Students make satisfactory progress. They feel that they are helped effectively when they find the work hard. Those with learning difficulties and disabilities receive appropriate support and make expected progress. Students joining the school after the beginning of Year 7 are assessed soundly on entry and assigned to appropriate mathematics groups, but their attainment is not used well enough to set targets or monitor their progress. Students do not have equal access to opportunities across teaching groups.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- identifying clear departmental priorities and incremental steps to achieve targets
- raising teaching quality through professional development based on sharper evaluation of students' progress in lessons
- involving students in assessing their progress in lessons and against national standards
- focusing lessons on enhancing and monitoring students' understanding.

### Citizenship

The overall effectiveness of citizenship was judged to be satisfactory.

#### Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in citizenship are satisfactory.

- Overall, standards in citizenship are in line with expectations for each year and are explained to parents in formal reports.
- Students have good understanding of citizenship topics taught in personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons, for example, human rights and global diversity. They raise perceptive issues in discussion. While their written work is satisfactory, their recall of past topics is patchy.
- Knowledge and understanding of citizenship are deepened through work done in other subjects, such as history and religious education. In lessons, students progress satisfactorily but often only a limited aspect of citizenship is covered and students do not even recognise it as citizenship.
- A good number of students participate and contribute well to the community through a wide range of activities, but there is no systematic monitoring of their involvement. Some activities focus on the school community. Others extend beyond this. They include some developed through specialist college status, and community service undertaken by sixth formers and by students in Key Stage 4 taking the work-related alternative curriculum known as the XL course.

#### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Students make good progress in knowledge and understanding of core citizenship during PSHE lessons because teachers are well informed and make good use of learning resources to provide interesting activities.
- Teaching and learning in other subjects which can contribute to citizenship, while good, generally focus on considering issues and impact at a personal level and rarely extend to the broader, public issues which are the concern of the citizenship curriculum. Consequently, students' learning of these aspects is satisfactory.

- Support in lessons for students with learning difficulties and disabilities is good.
- Information and communication technology is used very effectively in lessons and assemblies to capture interest and present information, for example, on world-wide issues.
- Students enjoy and are interested in the subject, discuss topics openly and respect the views of others; they work together constructively.
- All work seen has been safely conducted and aspects of health education are covered in schemes of work.
- Students' written work is checked for accuracy and content, however, students generally do not know the level at which they are working or how to improve.

### Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Provision of one hour per week for PSHE allows adequate coverage of citizenship, as learning is supplemented in other lessons and by out-of-school activities.
- Topics covered in PSHE take good account of requirements for knowledge and understanding in citizenship. Work is planned coherently and increases in complexity for older years.
- Enrichment activities in citizenship are good. Some were developed as specialist college initiatives, such as coaching primary-age students in sport, and others were developed by the school and local authority, for example, finding out about municipal arrangements through town-twinning in Europe. Participation is good among students of all abilities.
- Citizenship topics introduced in other subjects are rarely explored to give students insights into social implications and how they can be influenced and managed to benefit people more widely.

### Leadership and management of citizenship

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- Overall direction by the senior management team is strong and supported by the school's drive to strengthen students' personal development and well-being, and build on community links fostered as a specialist college.
- Leadership and management of citizenship provided in PSHE are satisfactory, with some good features. Curricular planning and resources to support classroom learning are good but the monitoring of students' progress is limited.
- The planning and management of citizenship in other subjects are very variable. The recent audit is a useful basis for evaluating its scope and potential development.

- The school council has status in the school and student councillors make a formal declaration on being admitted to it. Governors and the senior management team take seriously the students' voice.
- The school improvement plan acknowledges the need to strengthen citizenship provision.

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

Citizenship topics are effective in advancing awareness and understanding of Britain's diversity in this area that is predominantly white British. For example, students recall well citizenship topics about racial awareness and global responsibility. They also value and respect a recent project on Travellers: *Passing Places*.

### Inclusion

Students say "We're a friendly school," and speak readily about helping others new to the school. They say they know everyone, because the school is small, so each is welcomed as an individual. In turn, students who have arrived later than the usual time say that they were helped to settle in. Students of minority ethnic backgrounds and those who are vulnerable say they are happy in the school and feel respected. Students of all abilities, including the gifted and talented and those with learning difficulties, are comfortable learning together in classes and say their needs are met. Support in classes for those with learning difficulties and disabilities is good. The school celebrates the various achievements of different students, and they are very supportive of each other.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- provision of more regular assessment in citizenship so that students know how they are achieving and how they can improve
- strengthening the contribution to the citizenship curriculum of relevant topics in other subjects.

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

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and local learning and skills council and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Gill Close  
Her Majesty's Inspector