

27 September 2006

Mr D J Hampson - Principal
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Dear Mr Hampson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Evaluation of the impact of the Primary and Secondary National Strategies

I am grateful for the hospitality and co-operation of you and your staff during my visit with Brian Padgett HMI on 25-26 September to look at work in the Secondary National Strategy (SNS).

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the SNS with particular reference to English, the visit had a focus on the quality of continuity and progression for students on entry to secondary school with observations in Year 7 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 lessons in English and in Year 7 mathematics.

The overall effectiveness and impact of the SNS in English was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in English is good.

- Standards are above average with students making satisfactory progress to the end of Year 9 and good progress to the end of Year 11.

- The performance of boys is stronger at GCSE level than at Key Stage 3, particularly in reading.
- The SNS has had most impact on achievement in Years 10 and 11.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in English is good.

- Teachers' subject knowledge and lesson planning are good and relationships in classes are very good.
- Students learn effectively through regular pair and group discussion which is extended in many cases by teachers' good use of questions to encourage reasoned responses.
- Teachers use written comments effectively to help students improve their work.
- The SNS has had a good impact on teaching and learning in English although some aspects are not yet used consistently by all teachers, particularly learning objectives and the assessment of students' learning during the lesson.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- The SNS has led to very effective revision of schemes of work so that a wider range of texts and materials are used to engage students' interest.
- Schemes of work are effectively matched to the different levels of ability in classes.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management of the SNS in English are good.

- Teaching and students' progress are monitored thoroughly leading to very effective analysis which results in good strategies for improving students' attainment.
- The curriculum leader has led the implementation of the SNS rigorously with a strong focus on raising standards.
- The team of English teachers work together effectively and are very committed to improving teaching through adopting aspects of the SNS.

Provision in Year 7 mathematics

The quality of provision in Year 7 mathematics is satisfactory overall.

- Students in Year 7 make satisfactory progress mainly because teaching and learning are satisfactory.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge but they do not use approaches from the SNS fully to improve learning. Learning objectives are not made sufficiently clear and there are too few effective closing sessions where students' progress is assessed.
- Subject leadership and management are good, the curriculum is of good quality, and data on attainment are used very effectively to set students according to their mathematical ability.

The quality of transition to secondary school

The quality of arrangements for transition is good.

- The transition process is well managed, with especial care for the transition of vulnerable pupils, including those with learning difficulties.
- The focus on the continuity of learning between Year 6 and Year 7 is good, achieved by effective collaboration with Year 6 teachers on curriculum targets for students entering Year 7.
- The Year 7 pupils interviewed are upbeat about the college and proud to attend what they regard as an 'important school' with good facilities. All feel they are making good progress.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is good.

- Students who would benefit from additional teaching of literacy and numeracy skills are identified promptly and accurately.
- The programme of additional literacy and numeracy lessons in Years 7 and 8 is very good and achieves good levels of improvement for the selected students.
- The progress of all groups of students is very rigorously monitored by subject and senior staff leading to effective strategies to improve attainment.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

To achieve greater consistency of approach across all English teachers:

- ensure that lesson objectives focus on what students will learn rather than what they will do
- ensure that all teachers use effective questioning techniques which involve the whole class and encourage extended responses
- ensure that plenary sessions are used to assess students' progress against the learning objectives for the lesson.

These points also apply to improving teaching in Year 7 mathematics.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop English and the SNS in the college. As I explained in my previous letter, 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

Martin Cragg
Her Majesty's Inspector