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Mrs M Travers
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Travers

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 29 and 30 September 2010 to look at work 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and learners; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of 10 lessons or part-lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is satisfactory.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Attainment is average. The most recent, unvalidated, GCSE results show a sharp rise from 51% of students gaining an A* to C grade in 2009 to 68% of students achieving the same measure in 2010. Results from early entries and the school's monitoring records suggest that the higher results obtained in 2010 are sustainable.
- Progress is satisfactory given students' starting points. After a recent history of underachievement, more students achieved their challenging targets in 2010. Evidence from lessons seen supports the view that current students are making satisfactory progress; they make steady gains in their understanding of key ideas and their ability to tackle more complex problems.

- Boys' attainment at GCSE is higher than that of girls. In 2010, while those students identified as gifted or talented performed at least as well as other groups, other more able students performed less well than expected. As a result, the increase in A* to C grades was not matched by similar increases in the highest A* and A grades. The school's data suggest that gaps in attainment for different groups are not evident in Key Stage 3.
- Students show good attitudes to learning.

Quality of teaching of mathematics

The quality of teaching of mathematics is satisfactory.

- Teachers generally focus well on students' conceptual development by justifying mathematical results and selecting activities that promote understanding. Teachers' enthusiasm and their choice of activities promote students' positive attitudes and their readiness to tackle the tasks set.
- Teachers' good questioning skills challenge students and encourage them to explain their reasoning.
- Teachers take only limited account of individual students' prior learning, so that some students, particularly the most able, are not always challenged sufficiently. Occasionally, teachers lack rigour in their mathematical arguments or precision in their use of subject-specific language.
- The pace of learning in lessons is uneven. This is partly because teachers miss opportunities to provide students with immediate or systematic feedback that will help to consolidate learning.
- Students appreciate the good level of support that they receive outside lessons. Revision sessions after school prior to examinations are well attended. Other support, such as one-to-one tuition in Year 9, is having a positive impact on students' progress.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum caters for a range of students' needs and interests and promotes satisfactory progression in their learning. All students study GCSE mathematics and able students have an opportunity to study GCSE statistics.
- The scheme of work is organised well and helps teachers to access a range of teaching materials electronically. These materials focus on developing students' conceptual understanding and contribute to their increasingly positive attitudes and enjoyment in lessons.
- While the scheme of work offers a breadth of choice, some teachers would benefit from additional guidance, such as recommended core materials. Agreed common approaches to teaching particular topics would strengthen the progression of ideas for students.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics

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

- Provision and outcomes for students have improved: a legacy of underachievement has been tackled successfully; the new scheme of work promotes progression well; and school records show a greater proportion of good or better teaching. These improvements, together with accurate self-evaluation, demonstrate good capacity to improve.
- Senior leaders give a high priority to attracting staff to teach mathematics and developing their expertise. Leaders' drive and ambition are helping to create a shared sense of purpose among departmental staff.
- The gap in performance between boys and girls and between groups of different abilities has narrowed as a result of the focus on monitoring the performance of these groups of students.
- Managers' monitoring of the department is satisfactory but does not have sufficient rigour to check the broad range of teachers' practice and identify unhelpful inconsistencies.
- The school's specialist status is beginning to have an impact. Whole-school activities focusing on numeracy across the curriculum, the strengthening links with other local schools and universities and students' involvement in mathematics competitions are raising the profile of mathematics in the school and the local community.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising attainment further, particularly for more able girls
- improving teaching further by:
 - ensuring that a strong pace of learning is maintained
 - making full use of opportunities to provide in-class feedback and monitoring the progress of individuals
 - taking more account of students' prior learning to ensure that all students are suitably challenged
- promoting greater consistency in teaching approaches by providing more guidance for teachers and monitoring the work of the department more closely.

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

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Paul Chambers
Her Majesty's Inspector