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Mr L Dillon
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Dear Mr Dillon

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 24 and 25 May 2011 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 students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of six lessons, together with shorter visits to eight others.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Attainment overall is broadly average and on a clear upward trend. In 2010, 54% of students gained a grade A* to C in GCSE mathematics compared with the national average of 64%. The school's records indicate that current students are likely to achieve GCSE results that maintain the rising trend.
- Students enter the school with attainment that is below average and make good and, in some cases, excellent progress. Progress measures indicate that students make considerably more gains in their learning than similar students in other schools. Moreover, in 2010, the proportion of students making at least the expected three levels of progress was above average,

particularly for those who entered the school with attainment at Level 3 or Level 5.

- Current students make good progress in lessons. They show positive attitudes to their work and are keen to improve. They support each other effectively and enjoy working in pairs and groups. They tackle problems readily using informal methods to record their working. They are less effective in recording formally their solutions to multi-step problems.
- Different groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, all achieve well. In 2010, the group of students of Caribbean origin made outstanding progress, owing to the school's successful programme of mentoring, support and raising aspirations.

Quality of teaching in mathematics

The quality of teaching in mathematics is good.

- Teachers plan lessons thoroughly, selecting examples well so that students build their understanding through tackling progressively more demanding tasks. Teachers make regular and successful use of a variety of sorting and matching tasks that promotes discussion between students and support effective learning.
- Teaching has an appropriate focus on developing conceptual understanding. However, some students solve problems using techniques that they perform accurately without understanding the underlying mathematical principles.
- Students' regular opportunities to assess their own progress help them to reflect on their learning and assist teachers in ensuring that lesson content responds to individual needs. However, teachers could do more to monitor the quality of students' written work in lessons.
- The quality of marking is good. When marking books or tests, teachers offer supportive comments that are specific to the topic being covered and frequently relate to the level or grade of the work. In some cases, they offer additional guidance on what extra the student needs to do to attain the next level or grade.
- Teachers provide an effective programme of additional support through offering extra classes, particularly for students in Key Stage 4. Students appreciate the opportunity to use computer-based teaching programmes that they can access at home.

Quality of the curriculum in mathematics

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is good.

- The curriculum meets the needs of the students well and contributes to their good achievement. All students study GCSE mathematics and, in 2010, all gained passes at grades A* to G.
- The scheme of work ensures full coverage of the National Curriculum. For Key Stage 3, the scheme makes useful reference to National Curriculum levels and this helps teachers to plan appropriate work for students of

different abilities within the class. Schemes promote the development of students' skills in using and applying mathematics across both key stages.

- Members of the department appreciate the need to strengthen the scheme of work with additional references to recommended teaching resources and specific tasks in using and applying mathematics, to ensure a more consistent experience for all students.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics

The effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics is outstanding.

- Impressive rises in attainment are apparent in a range of measures. For example, since 2008, the proportion of students gaining grades A* to C at GCSE has risen from 34% to 54%; for the highest A* and A grades, the proportion has risen from 3% to 14%. A similar trend is evident in students' average point scores, and progress measures show that increasing proportions of students are achieving well relative to their starting points.
- Leaders and managers have successfully improved not only GCSE results but also students' attitudes to mathematics. Teaching staff have a positive approach to professional development and are committed to improving provision and outcomes. Students are confident that they can achieve well in mathematics and increasing numbers are choosing to continue their study of the subject at AS level.
- Self-evaluation is accurate. Leaders and managers have clear ideas about where improvements can be made, although written plans would benefit from a broader range of measurable targets.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that students' written work is more closely monitored in lessons, to strengthen assessment and promote students' clearer presentation of mathematical arguments
- strengthening references in the scheme of work to where suitable teaching materials may be found and to specific activities that promote the development of students' skills in using and applying mathematics.

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

As 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Paul Chambers
Her Majesty's Inspector