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Ms M Bailey
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Bailey

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 9 and 10 June 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; observation of eight lessons (including two conducted jointly with your staff); and shorter visits to five other lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is satisfactory.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Students' attainment in mathematics has been slightly below the national average for several years but it has begun to improve. Students who took GCSE statistics in 2010 attained better than their peers nationally.
- Historically, students' progress has been below average, but the quality of their learning is better this year as a consequence of a well-managed raising of expectations across the faculty and improvements in teaching. Variations in the achievement of different groups have been addressed. For example, girls' achievement is now in line with boys' and is improving at a similar rate. Students with special educational needs and/or

disabilities make satisfactory progress because teachers and teaching assistants work effectively together.

- Targets are demanding and are used well to monitor performance and drive necessary improvements. Students have a clear sense of the grades expected of them and value the clarity with which teachers indicate their next steps. There is now good capacity to extend the mathematical development of the most able mathematicians beyond GCSE through, for example, the provision of more demanding qualifications.
- Students of all levels of ability enjoy mathematics. The vast majority appreciate its importance and show commitment. This is a result of the positive ethos in the faculty; students feel that their teachers will 'go the extra mile' for them. The lack of formal mechanisms beyond questionnaires to involve students in improving their learning in mathematics is a missed opportunity as they have the maturity and insight to make useful contributions.

Quality of teaching in mathematics

The quality of teaching in mathematics is satisfactory.

- The appraisal of the quality of teaching is honest and thorough. No teaching is less than satisfactory and aspects of the satisfactory and good teaching are improving. The best prioritises students' understanding of their work and encourages questioning about, for example, why certain techniques work, and how seemingly different methods are fundamentally similar. It emphasises the importance of fluency with basic mathematical skills and builds on them securely.
- While all teachers take regard of the faculty's and school's expectations about lesson planning and managing approaches to learning, their implementation is inconsistent. While students are generally amenable, in some lessons, they do not maintain high levels of concentration or challenge themselves and others sufficiently rigorously.
- Information from the school's systems for monitoring students' progress offers significant insight into the needs of individuals and groups of students. Not all teaching, however, makes full use of it in lesson planning and in ensuring that work is closely matched to all students' abilities.

Quality of the curriculum in mathematics

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is good.

- The curriculum reflects the faculty's emphasis on providing challenge and supporting those who struggle. Students are guided into the most appropriate pathway through Key Stage 4. The main route gives the opportunity for skills to develop at a steady rate and for GCSE mathematics to be taken at the end of Year 11. Others offer capable mathematicians more challenge by taking GCSE statistics in Year 10, and for the most able to complete their GCSE mathematics course in Year 10 and embark on the additional mathematics course in Year 11.

- Schemes of work provide useful detail about the mathematical content to be covered with groups, but contain little guidance as to how it is most effectively taught. They are being updated and improved, placing an appropriately greater emphasis on the use and application of mathematics in all year groups. Students have relatively few opportunities to use information and communication technology (ICT) in their mathematics lessons, but some good use is made of online resources in homework.
- All students take level 1 or 2 qualifications in functional English, mathematics and ICT by Year 10. Students enjoy the opportunity this gives them to see the uses and applications of mathematics in their lives.
- A range of good intervention opportunities supports the progress of individual students. These opportunities include after-school booster classes, one-to-one tuition, and Easter and half-term revision classes. The school's data systems enable accurate identification of students who would benefit from such support.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics

The effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics is good.

- The new head of faculty has already made a significant impact on achievement in mathematics. Working closely with you and key members of your senior team, faculty leadership is based on a clear vision for improving achievement by raising expectations of outcomes for students and improving teaching.
- The faculty appraises its performance rigorously and accurately and has a very good sense of its strengths and development needs. Quality assurance procedures are thorough and outcomes of this regular monitoring lead to effective strategies to improve practice. Planning is effective because it interprets whole-school priorities into relevant and important actions in the faculty.
- Mathematics plays a strong role in the school's specialist work. Relationships with local primary schools are good. Plans include further development of these links, collaborative work with other local secondary schools, and a range of mathematics-related activities to highlight the significance and distinctiveness of the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring greater consistency of practice, especially in securing consistently high levels of students' active participation in learning
- making greater use of the high-quality information about students' achievements to match work in lessons more accurately to the needs of individuals and groups
- capturing within the schemes of work the outcomes of discussions on approaches to teaching aspects of mathematics, and more opportunities to extend the use of ICT to support students' learning in lessons

- involving students in helping to secure further improvements in the work of the faculty.

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

Alan Taylor-Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector