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Mrs C Grant
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Grant

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 22 and 23 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 three lessons and brief visits to two other lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Students enter the school with below average attainment. They make good progress in their time at school and by Year 11 their attainment is broadly average. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make particularly good progress. The attainment of boys and girls is very similar.
- Students enjoy learning mathematics and some aspire to follow the subject in their post-16 studies. One parent has written to the school describing how her 'maths phobic' children have become 'maths superstars'.
- Students work well together in class and their behaviour is at least good and sometimes exemplary. In an outstanding Year 10 lesson, groups of

students were engaged in a team challenge solving problems in trigonometry, one of which required the taking of bearings in the school playground. They worked with real energy and supported each other in their teams to solve the problems. Another more able student said that she had always been pressed to achieve her full potential and had never been allowed to 'coast'.

- Students express an admiration for the commitment of their teachers. They say that the teachers boost their confidence and provide a great deal of support within and outside formal class time. One described the maths teachers as 'brilliant'.

Quality of teaching in mathematics

The quality of teaching in mathematics is good.

- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to provide very clear explanations. Students describe in particular how useful they have found the clear steps that they have been encouraged to follow, for example, in applying Pythagoras' theorem.
- In lessons observed, teachers provided a rich variety of activity and practical work. However, analysis of students' work shows that this is more common in Years 7 and 8 than in later years. Students in these later years described their lessons as having fewer opportunities to explore, use and apply mathematics.
- Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities benefit from small classes, high-quality teaching assistants and targeted extra support when needed. The close links with the special educational needs department enables a rapid response when monitoring shows that a student needs additional support. Lower ability students in Years 7 and 8 are taught in a very practical way. This includes exploring the local results of the 1881 census, using data-handling skills to explore data on the birds visiting bird feeders and weighing ingredients for cooking biscuits. In this way, these students see mathematics as a relevant, vital and interesting life skill. A Year 8 class demonstrated outstanding behaviour as they were fully absorbed in supporting each other in a practical task.

Quality of the curriculum in mathematics

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is good.

- The mathematics scheme of learning provides students with a well-structured experience of the mathematics curriculum. Practical applications of mathematics are explored in all year groups. However, the opportunities to explore, use and apply mathematics are not explicit in the scheme of learning. As a result, practice varies between teaching groups and the experience of using and applying mathematics declines as students move through the school. Some use is made of information and communication technology to explore the transformation of graphs but, overall, its use to investigate within mathematics is underdeveloped.

- Support for students who may need extra support is very highly developed. Extensive, frequent support and revision classes provided outside formal curriculum time are very much appreciated by the students.
- Teachers use the opportunities provided by local and national events to enrich students' mathematical experience. These include national competitions, the National Mathematics Day, the NSPCC Number Day, and the Wessex Partnership Peer Teaching Competition. Teachers respond to the school's arts college status by planning lessons exploring the impact of mathematics in art, for example in Islamic patterns. In some of these initiatives, teachers also involve pupils from local primary schools.
- Some students have taken their GCSE examination by the end of Year 10. Current curriculum plans will enable some students in Year 11 to access mathematical topics which bridge the gap to A level in a smaller teaching group.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics

The effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics is good.

- Senior and departmental leaders have applied whole-school initiatives well to improve the quality of teaching in mathematics over the last five years, leading to steady rises in students' attainment. The quality of teaching is now good and students make good progress. The mathematics teachers form a cohesive, highly motivated and committed team.
- The monitoring of students' progress is thorough and enables teachers to intervene as soon as a student starts to fall behind. A full self-evaluation document and a good departmental plan maintain a strong focus on raising attainment.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the opportunities, planned into the scheme of learning, for all students to explore, use and apply mathematics including the wider use of information and communication technology.

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.

Yours sincerely

Robert Barbour
Her Majesty's Inspector