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3 October 2011

Mr T Phillips  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Phillips

### **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 20 and 21 September 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 nine lessons, four of which were with you and your senior staff, and shorter visits to three other lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

#### **Achievement in mathematics**

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Students' attainment in mathematics by the end of Year 11 is slightly above average, from a starting point that is in line with national averages. Indicators of progress over the last few years have been consistently positive because of the good progress made by middle ability students. Relatively few students obtain the very highest GCSE grade.
- No significant differences exist in the achievement of boys and girls, or in the performance of the relatively small number of students from minority ethnic groups. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported and achieve as well as their peers in mathematics.

- Behaviour is generally good but students tend to be passive learners, not challenging their own understanding nor eager to explore alternative approaches. Some appreciate the connections between their learning in different areas of mathematics.

### **Quality of teaching in mathematics**

The quality of teaching in mathematics is good.

- Teachers ensure that a high proportion of students meet the appropriately demanding targets set. Teaching is aimed at students achieving mastery of skills and techniques and there is ample opportunity given to practise them and to apply them confidently. In one lesson observed, students who sometimes struggle with mathematics were dealing confidently with some basic but important algebraic techniques, showing understanding and enjoyment in using their new skills in a competitive computer game.
- Teachers' explanations of mathematical ideas are clear, and mathematical language is used with precision. A useful emphasis on literacy supports progress by enabling students to enunciate problems and explain their mathematical thinking clearly.
- Interim assessments are used to identify underachievement and individuals are supported appropriately. In lessons, however, continual assessment of students' understanding is not used consistently to provide good feedback to teachers on how to steer learning.
- Although significant attention is given to eliminating underachievement, not enough attention is given to the needs of the more able students in each group who sometimes need to work faster, in a different way, or on different and more challenging material.

### **Quality of the curriculum in mathematics**

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is satisfactory.

- All students learn mathematics in a way that ensures logical progression through topics and allows for support and intervention to boost achievement. Depending on the needs and interests of students in the top set, the opportunity to take GCSE statistics is sometimes provided alongside mathematics GCSE in Year 11. Currently, the most able students do not undertake work beyond GCSE in mathematics.
- Opportunities for students to use information and communication technology (ICT) in lessons to stimulate and extend learning are relatively few. Students do have access to material through the school's website to practise their skills for homework. The scheme of work provides an appropriate emphasis on using and applying mathematics and problem-solving approaches in all years, but the activities are usually restricted to those in the scheme, with little fresh or topical material introduced.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics**

The effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics is satisfactory.

- The head of department supports his team and organises their work efficiently. He transmits this ethos of care to students who generally enjoy their work in mathematics and feel well supported as a consequence.
- Little professional development provision is specific to the needs of the mathematics teachers. Discussions about approaches and teaching techniques remain at an informal level and do not influence schemes of work or result in the adoption of an agreed approach to improving the quality of learning in a topic. Opportunities for staff to observe and discuss the work of other teachers in the department are infrequent and are not given sufficient priority.
- Development planning concentrates on some relevant priorities but a lack of clarity about desired outcomes results in actions being defined with insufficient precision. This also makes it difficult to gauge and influence the progress made towards meeting these priorities. No opportunities exist for students to contribute their views on their learning in mathematics, to assist the department to reflect on its practice.
- Judgements by senior staff about the quality of teaching are accurate. At a departmental level, some satisfactory aspects of teaching are regarded too positively. This is associated with an under-emphasis on identifying the depth and security of learning and a lack of any clear description of what constitutes good and outstanding mathematics teaching.

**Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- assessing understanding frequently in every lesson, to inform teaching strategies and present opportunities to offer work of appropriate challenge to all students
- considering the adoption of additional courses, specific extension opportunities and extra-curricular activities that will provide consistent challenge and stimulus for the most able mathematicians and lead to more students reaching the A\* grade at GCSE
- planning a range of professional development opportunities for teachers of mathematics which will suit their needs, and serve to stimulate discussion about approaches to supporting learning in 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

**Alan Taylor-Bennett**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**