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Mrs C Chidwick
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Chidwick

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 29 and 30 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; and observation of seven lessons, with shorter visits to seven more lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is satisfactory.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Attainment is above average. This is illustrated by the 2010 GCSE results, in which 76% of students gained a grade A* to C, compared with the national average of 64%. However, this is not a consistent picture and in some years, where the cohort has weaker attainment on entry to the school, attainment is closer to the national average.
- Students make satisfactory progress in lessons and over their time in the school. Over the last three years, most groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, made progress in line with expectations. In 2010, more students made the expected three levels of progress than was the case nationally.

- Attainment in the sixth form is broadly average. Students make satisfactory progress.
- Students have good attitudes to mathematics. They enjoy the subject and are keen to succeed. They respond well to structured tasks; they are less confident in tackling multi-step or open-ended questions. Students are able to apply a range of techniques to solve equations of increasing complexity; they are less confident in expressing ideas algebraically.

Quality of teaching in mathematics

The quality of teaching in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Teachers display enthusiasm for the subject. They use their good subject knowledge to plan lessons that focus on key ideas and to anticipate likely difficulties. They use questioning well to probe students' understanding, encouraging extended answers and explanations.
- Most teaching has an appropriate focus on developing students' understanding of mathematical ideas, justifying results and building up conceptual understanding. However, some teaching focuses too much on techniques that students learn to apply without understanding fully the underlying concepts.
- Teachers promote skills of independent learning through providing differentiated activities that allow students to select appropriate levels of challenge.
- Most students benefit from using self-assessment to reflect on their learning and to plan future work. However, teachers could do more to assess the students' understanding during lessons to sharpen the pace of learning and to check that students' self-assessments are accurate.

Quality of the curriculum in mathematics

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is satisfactory.

- The curriculum meets the needs of students. Examination entries at the end of Key Stage 4 are adapted to meet individual needs. Able students have the opportunity to study for GCSE statistics and, in 2010, all those who sat the examination were successful in gaining a grade C or above.
- In the sixth form, the good curriculum includes opportunities for students to study for AS and A-level mathematics and further mathematics. In addition, the timetable allows students with GCSE grades D and E to attend classes to help improve their grade in the resit examinations. Increasing numbers are opting for sixth-form studies based on the International Baccalaureate qualifications. Of these students, approximately half include higher-level mathematics as part of their studies.
- The scheme of work offers a helpful framework for teachers to plan their lessons. The Key Stage 4 and sixth-form schemes follow closely the guidance from the examination board. The Key Stage 3 scheme gives adequate guidance but leaders and managers accept the need for some

updating and additional detail. A useful collection of 'rich tasks' is available and teachers would benefit from guidance on which tasks develop which skills and how these skills are developed over time.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics

The effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics is satisfactory.

- An underlying trend of improvement is evident in results, although there are fluctuations year on year. The department is getting closer to meeting challenging targets.
- A steady rise in the number of students opting to study mathematics in the sixth form reflects students' enjoyment of the subject and their growing confidence in their mathematical abilities.
- Overall self-evaluation is accurate. However, evaluation of individual lessons focuses too much on the quality of teaching rather than its impact on students' learning.
- Increased communication with parents, regular monitoring of progress against targets, and focused support for individual students are having a positive impact on students' attitudes and progress.
- Teachers have positive attitudes to developing their practice. They benefit from planned opportunities to share ideas within the department and to develop broader teaching skills through participating in the school's 'learning communities'.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing teaching further through:
 - assessing learning more systematically during lessons
 - checking that students' self-evaluation is accurate
- developing students' ability to respond to unstructured and/or extended questions through providing a structured approach to developing skills of using and applying mathematics
- ensuring that lesson evaluations give more emphasis to the impact of teaching on the quality of learning.

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