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Mr P Scutt
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Scutt

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 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 five lessons and brief visits to four others.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Results in GCSE mathematics have shown a steady upward trend. Students make good progress during their time at the school.
- Year 11 students responded well to a lesson starter activity where the teacher gave them a volume and asked for examples of possible objects and their dimensions that would have this volume. The open-ended nature of the task enabled the students to revise their knowledge creatively and develop their understanding.
- Year 7 students, who are in their first month at the school, enthusiastically explored the patterns made by shapes composed of matchsticks. Working in pairs, they made and tested predictions and developed ways of expressing their ideas using symbols.

- Students develop a good facility with mathematics and appreciate its value. They work accurately and neatly. They do, however, find some routine practice a bit dull.

Quality of teaching in mathematics

The quality of teaching in mathematics is good.

- Teachers plan their lessons well, have clear lesson objectives and good subject knowledge.
- They explain concepts clearly and use effective ways of assessing how well students understand them. Many use mini-whiteboards, where every student gives the answer to questions. Sometimes a computer is used to generate names at random, so students all know they may be answering a particular question. In the best practice observed, the questioning was probing and developed into a dialogue where the students also framed questions to help extend their understanding.
- Teachers mark books regularly. As well as commenting on the level of a student's effort, they draw attention to errors and misconceptions and take time to explain the reason behind a mistake.
- Teachers generally use a variety of interesting approaches in their lessons. However, in some lessons too much time is taken up working through textbooks or worksheets with students simply practising techniques rather than developing wider understanding.

Quality of the curriculum in mathematics

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is satisfactory.

- The schemes of work provide clear guidance on the learning objectives covered by every class in each term. They give much less guidance, however, on the ways in which students will use and apply the mathematics that they learn, or how they can develop their reasoning skills within mathematics. As a result, the experience that students receive varies considerably depending on which teaching group they are in.
- The department has many useful resources for enriching learning with information and communication technology. Students experience these both in class with interactive whiteboards and in a computer room when they each have access to a computer. However, because the activities are not well integrated into the schemes of work, students' experiences do once again vary widely by teaching group.
- Useful provision made outside normal lesson time includes an online mathematics club, revision clubs and opportunities for some Year 11 students to study statistics to GCSE level.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics

The effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics is good.

- Leaders and managers have taken concerted and effective action to raise standards. They monitor students' progress carefully and arrange high quality extra provision for students who fall behind expectations in Year 11. A programme to improve the quality of teachers' questioning and assessment during lessons has further improved the overall quality of teaching.
- Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the strengths of the department and of its needs and plan well for the future. A very perceptive report on the needs of students who lack confidence in mathematics has been produced and reflects the department's determination to meet their needs fully. The capacity for further improvement is good.
- The mathematics department has taken a full part in local opportunities for professional development for teachers. This has led to the joint production of some excellent teaching resources. These have been trialled in school and are now ready for wider dissemination across the department.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing systematic approaches to using and applying mathematics and integrating them into the scheme of work to:
 - foster students' reasoning skills
 - increase the extent to which students apply the mathematics that they learn
 - raise students' enjoyment of the subject.

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