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Mr A Pinnock
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Dear Mr Pinnock

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 7 and 8 February 2012 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 six lessons, together with short visits to 10 other lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is satisfactory.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Attainment is average. Within this overall judgement, different measures show variations in recent years. For example, the proportion of students gaining GCSE grades A* to C in 2011 was below average while, in 2010, the proportion of students gaining the highest A* and A grades was above average. Data supplied by the school indicate that current Year 11 students are likely to attain higher results than in 2010 or 2011.
- Students make satisfactory progress during lessons and over time. Most groups, including disabled students and those with special educational needs and those known to be entitled to free school meals, achieve in line with others. Girls make more progress than boys. In 2011, students whose

first language is other than English made good progress, while middle-ability students made less progress than other ability groups.

- In the sixth form, while attainment at A level is below average, students make satisfactory progress given their prior attainment at GCSE.
- Most students display positive attitudes to mathematics but some give up too easily or work well only when under close supervision. Students enjoy and value opportunities to use matching and sorting activities as part of their learning. Older students set out algebraic arguments, such as for solving equations, in a logical way and can explain their steps.

Quality of teaching in mathematics

The quality of teaching in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Teachers make good use of interactive whiteboards to present mathematical ideas and structure progression within a lesson. Most have a good focus on developing students' grasp of subject-specific language. They establish positive working relationships with students.
- Teachers plan interesting activities that aim to develop understanding rather than just techniques, including some that cater for different abilities within the class by offering challenges at different levels. However, some activities are mundane and do not provide sufficient challenge, particularly for the more-able students.
- The use of assessment is satisfactory. Where it is weaker, teachers miss opportunities to feed back to students during lessons and to check their progress. Teachers do not always make full use of questioning to involve students in their learning or to assess general understanding.

Quality of the curriculum in mathematics

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Almost all students enter for the GCSE examination and gain accreditation at grades A* to G. Able students in Year 11 have the opportunity to experience further challenge through studying for a free-standing mathematics qualification. In the sixth form, as well as AS and A-level mathematics, students can study further mathematics, and those who want to improve their GCSE grade are supported through regular timetabled sessions. Approximately 20% of students completing Year 11 chose to study mathematics in the sixth form, making it the most popular subject at AS and A level.
- The schemes of work provide useful guidance on the order of topics, timescales and assessment points. Although links are provided to tasks that focus on developing students' skills in using and applying mathematics, it is not clear which tasks constitute a minimum entitlement for all students in a particular year.
- Key Stage 4 students appreciate the additional lessons that are available after school to help them to improve; they also value the opportunity to access from home online materials which help in their revision.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics

The effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics is satisfactory.

- While the overall GCSE results have remained steady, the proportion of students gaining GCSE grades A* to C has dropped, as have sixth-form success rates. Leaders and managers have recognised the need to put a high priority on improving results; they have sought and responded to an external review, acted decisively, and put in place a range of measures that focus on raising standards in both the short term and the longer term. Early signs show that these measures are beginning to have a positive impact on provision and overall outcomes.
- Members of the department support each other well and show positive attitudes to improving their practice. Students believe that teaching is better now than in the past.
- Self-evaluation is realistic. Senior leaders, together with the subject leader, have a clear view of the strengths and weaknesses of the department and what needs to improve. They have identified which groups of students have, in the past, achieved better than others and are monitoring the progress of current students. However, the impact of measures to target the achievement of different groups is currently unclear.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising achievement, particularly for boys, through ensuring that teaching:
 - provides an appropriate level of challenge for all students
 - engages students effectively, including in responding to questions
- improving in-class assessment to ensure that:
 - students know how well they are progressing
 - teachers have a broader view of students' learning
- developing the scheme of work further to identify a minimum entitlement of tasks that develop students' skills in using and applying 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

Paul Chambers
Her Majesty's Inspector