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Mrs S Willman  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Willman

### **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 14 and 15 March 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 the observation of nine lessons, four of which were with senior staff.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is satisfactory.

#### **Achievement in mathematics**

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Students' attainment at Key Stage 4 is broadly average. The proportion of students achieving grades A\* to C in GCSE mathematics increased in 2011 as a result of measures taken to boost achievement.
- The achievement of the majority of students is broadly in line with expectations, but those with special educational needs/and or disabilities did not make sufficient progress last year and too many students with low prior attainment did not achieve the expected outcomes at Key Stage 4. The achievement of these groups has improved this year as a result of closer monitoring of their progress and better support mechanisms.
- A relatively small group of students took GCSE statistics at the end of Year 10 in 2011 and many achieved well. Students in the sixth form make good

progress in A-level mathematics and A-level further mathematics. These are popular and successful post-16 courses.

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

The quality of teaching in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Much of the teaching is satisfactory; some is good. All teachers plan lessons with careful regard to the needs of their classes and successfully use a range of teaching resources and strategies.
- Teaching in the sixth form is better than in Key Stages 3 and 4. It responds effectively to the wide range of ability in the large A-level teaching classes, and offers good levels of challenge balanced with well-judged support for groups and individuals. Sometimes students' mathematical curiosity is not fired and opportunities are missed to reflect on alternative approaches and the significance of outcomes to questions.
- The school has appropriately prioritised developing the use of assessment. Some teachers have yet to appreciate the vital role that good-quality questioning and regular checking of understanding plays in stimulating high-quality learning. In too many satisfactory lessons, teachers fail to acquire a good grasp of the nature of students' misconceptions, and are therefore not able to respond appropriately. Some teachers are beginning to use a range of assessment techniques with some success.

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

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is satisfactory.

- The curriculum meets the needs of students. Teachers discuss how certain teaching methods can support better learning and understanding of topics; as a consequence, more effective approaches are being used with increasing consistency across the faculty.
- The faculty's schemes of work, introduced last year, enable teachers to be more responsive to the needs of each teaching group. The means by which achievement is monitored is becoming more sophisticated: it is being used well to influence the progress of groups and individuals.
- A course in Additional Mathematics provides good levels of challenge for more-able students in Key Stage 4.
- Students' use of information and communication technology (ICT) is underdeveloped. Currently, schemes of work identify few resources and require little use of ICT. Well-developed plans to improve this aspect of the faculty's work include more systematic and frequent use of laptop computers in all classes.
- All students have opportunities to use and apply mathematics in lessons and for homework but the approach to the provision of investigative and functional mathematics for all students is not consistent.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics is good.

- The new head of faculty identified the strengths and development priorities of the faculty accurately; this analysis forms the basis of the faculty improvement plan. He demonstrates a sense of urgency and purpose about driving up achievement, with evidence of improvement. The achievement of groups of previously underperforming students is better this year.
- Improving the quality of teaching is an appropriately high priority. Staff are supported through individual plans at one of three levels, which reflect their individual needs. Morale in the faculty is good with a willingness to 'do things differently' to generate improvement. Some of the satisfactory teaching is demonstrating elements of good practice this year as a result. The faculty has reached an understanding about the role of marking in supporting achievement, and good practice is emerging.
- The collective professional development needs of staff are being met through faculty meetings, after-school sessions and school training days. Opportunities to share good practice have increased. The head of faculty monitors lessons every week but lesson observations that result in high-quality discussions about the quality of learning are not sufficiently frequent.
- A move to more distributed leadership across the faculty is evident. Heads of each key stage are supporting improvement but are still to make the transition to be accountable for outcomes rather than processes.

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

- improving the quality of teaching by emphasising the significance of the use of assessment throughout all lessons by:
  - developing the quality of questioning and establishing a range of other mechanisms to gauge students' understanding
  - close monitoring by all staff with responsibilities in the faculty of the implementation of these developments
  - ensuring that teachers have opportunities to observe each other's work, and discuss the quality of the learning
- continuing to develop the schemes of work to capture new ideas about improving learning, and to define a minimum entitlement to work involving the use and application of mathematics, and the use of ICT.

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**