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22 May 2012

Mr P Loveday
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Dear Mr Loveday

Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 1 and 2 May 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 nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is satisfactory.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Students enter the school with attainment that is above average. They make progress which is similar to students nationally given their starting points. The proportion attaining GCSE A* to C grades has improved in the last three years to above average. The proportion gaining A* or A grades has been in line with national figures but looks set to rise in 2012.
- Students make the best progress in lessons when they are able to adopt an investigational approach to think through ideas and to discuss them with their peers. They show resilience and a determination to succeed.
- Difficulties in staffing have had an adverse effect on students' attitudes to mathematics and their achievement. These staffing issues are being resolved and students are showing a more positive attitude to

mathematics. In the vast majority of lessons observed, students showed an enjoyment of the subject and engaged positively with their teachers and each other.

Quality of teaching in mathematics

The quality of teaching in mathematics is satisfactory.

- In the best lessons, teachers provide a variety of activities which engage and challenge students of all abilities. Students have opportunities for problem solving through investigative approaches, discussion and independent working. Teachers use high-level questioning techniques to assess students' understanding and to deepen their learning.
- Characteristics of the satisfactory teaching include teachers dominating lessons through talking too much and not challenging all students suitably. Opportunities for students to investigate and to discuss their thoughts and ideas with each other are limited. Not enough time is given to assessing all students' understanding and for them to consolidate and extend their learning.
- Students commented that the lessons they find the best are well organised with a variety of challenging activities. They like to be able to get down to work quickly. They also said that in the lessons that were not so good, teachers spoke too much and they were not given enough time to grasp new ideas and practise techniques.
- Assessment practice has been developed through the implementation of the red, amber, green rating system. This enables students to indicate their level of confidence with new concepts. Marking is inconsistent with few examples of effective marking that informs students what they have done well and what they need to do to improve.

Quality of the curriculum in mathematics

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is good.

- Schemes of learning have been re-written recently and provide a more cohesive approach within the department. Continuity and progression are built in clearly with adequate opportunities to extend learning. Appropriate pathways have been implemented which support the less able but also extend the more able. The top set of students now begins GCSE in Year 9. The school has also introduced free standing mathematics and additional mathematics qualifications and is planning to use a financial capability module.
- Regular opportunities are provided for problem solving and investigative approaches although this change in approach is not embedded fully at this stage. Students use information and communication technology to enhance their learning. Intervention and support for students are also provided through daily 'maths clinics' and after-school sessions. Students commented that the mathematics department has improved, is well organised and they feel supported.

- Students have some experience of mathematics beyond the classroom through mathematics challenges and the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics initiative. These opportunities, though, need to be extended to involve mathematics activities within the school and links to local businesses to provide students with a wide range of enrichment and enhancement.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics

The effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics is good.

- A new director of learning for mathematics took up his post one year ago. He has raised expectations about achievement and the quality of teaching. New schemes of learning have been introduced and the curriculum developed to ensure progression in students' learning and opportunities to develop their conceptual understanding.
- The director of learning has an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the mathematics department and the key priorities in moving the department forward. The initiatives he has implemented are in their early stages of development and consequently not embedded fully but they are beginning to show signs of positive impact.
- The department shares best practice and ideas regularly and this is aiding improvement in the quality of teaching. Target setting and monitoring of practice is robust with a clear focus on ensuring that students increasingly make good and better progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the proportion of good and better teaching by:
 - ensuring that lessons proceed at an appropriate pace, engage all students and provide opportunities for students to reflect on their learning
 - providing regular opportunities for students to work independently and with each other
 - using high-quality questioning techniques to assess and deepen students' learning
 - making sure that marking consistently informs students about how to improve their work.

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

Simon Rowe
Additional Inspector