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Mr G Lloyd  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Lloyd

### **Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit with my colleague Nigel Boyd, Additional Inspector, on 30 and 31 January 2013 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 12 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics requires improvement.

#### **Achievement in mathematics**

Achievement in mathematics requires improvement.

- Students start at the school with below-average standards. Achievement has been broadly average over the last few years with the exception of 2012 when results fell significantly. The school has responded quickly and expects standards to be back to broadly average in 2013. Around a quarter of Year 11 students will take GCSE examination at the end of March with the intention of gaining a grade C pass before extending to reach a higher grade in the summer. The rest of the students will complete their GCSE at the end of Year 11.
- In lessons, progress is variable. In the best, teaching develops understanding and students are highly motivated and engaged in their

learning. Too often, however, students complete mundane tasks with limited enthusiasm and learning requires improvement.

- Attitudes to learning are variable. Evidence from lesson observations shows that, given the right level of challenge and activities that motivate, students' behaviour is good and teachers do not have to focus on controlling of the class. However in some lessons, attitudes and behaviour require improvement because students show limited interest in their work.

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

The quality of teaching in mathematics is requires improvement.

- While much of the teaching is good, too much requires improvement because it fails to motivate and engage students to make good progress. Too often work does not challenge students and does not meet the needs of different ability groups within a class.
- In the best lessons, teachers use a variety of activities and question students well so that they have to give reasons for their answers. This helps them to develop understanding. Students often work in groups, discussing their work and supporting each other.
- Some teachers ask questions and monitor students at work to check on how well different groups are progressing. In other classes, interaction is limited to those students who have their hands up for help. Marking is frequent but varies in quality. Teachers rarely make use of comments to identify how the students might improve their work, other than generic advice like 'try harder'. Students contrasted this style of marking with feedback in other subjects when they are given activities to extend their work and time to complete these follow-up tasks.

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

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is requires improvement.

- The subject leader was promoted to the post in September 2012. She has rightly identified the need to improve the quality of lesson planning. At present, the school follows published schemes with varying opportunities for students to use and apply their mathematics or to use information communication technology (ICT).
- The school has ensured students complete their mathematics GCSE course at the end of Year 11 to gain their best possible grade and it has supported underachieving groups through intervention classes. Students commented that staff are very willing to provide help at any time.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics requires improvement.

- Having started as headteacher in January 2013, you have been quick to identify the need to bring about significant improvement to the quality of teaching and to raise achievement in mathematics. You have found that many of the weaknesses in leadership and management of the subject are common to weaknesses more generally across the school.
- A key weakness has been the lack of systematic evaluation of the impact of teaching on students' outcomes and the effectiveness of intervention activities. Staff have not been held to account for the progress of their pupils. Targets for students' attainment are not sufficiently challenging and are not adjusted quickly to become more challenging when a student achieves the target.
- The subject leader had identified accurately the department's strengths and weaknesses and has well-constructed plans to bring about the necessary improvements. The mathematics staff are supportive of the new subject leader and understand that the department is not currently operating at the level it should. They have a common ambition to improve.

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

- increasing the proportion of good and outstanding teaching by:
  - increasing the pace of learning for all ability groups
  - making sure that work is matched to students' different abilities so that it is not too easy or too hard but consistently challenging
  - improving the quality of questioning to help students to understand their work
  - ensuring marking identifies errors and provides advice on how to improve, coupled with activities to consolidate the improvements and time for students to complete them
- building upon the improvements to the leadership of the department by:
  - undertaking rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching to evaluate the impact of teaching on learning
  - setting challenging targets for students and adjusting these when a student has achieved their target early
  - using progress data to evaluate the impact of interventions and other initiatives and setting challenging targets for staff by which their performance can be judged.

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

**Michael Smith**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**