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Mr R Jones
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Dear Mr Jones

Ofsted 2013–14 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 21 and 22 October 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 six lessons, together with shorter visits to eight other lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is outstanding.

Achievement in mathematics is outstanding.

- Students' attainment is high. For example, the proportion of students passing GCSE mathematics in 2012 with grades A* to C was 84%, compared with a national figure of 70%. The proportion of students gaining the highest A* and A grades is also high.
- Data for 2012 show more students making the expected progress from all their various starting points than is the case nationally. The proportions exceeding the expected progress also compare favourably with national figures.
- Unvalidated results for 2013 are stronger overall than those for 2012, including in measures of progress, although slightly fewer students attained the highest grades.

- Girls and boys do equally well. Over time, disabled students and those with special educational needs make outstanding progress.
- In 2012, the gap between the attainment of students known to be eligible for free school meals and other students, at just under half a GCSE grade, was considerably less than the gap nationally, and students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, as other groups, made outstanding progress. However, unvalidated figures for 2013 show a smaller proportion of this group of students making the expected progress than in 2012.
- In the relatively new sixth form, students make good progress overall from their various starting points. In 2012, more students completed advanced-level courses successfully than was the case nationally. However, not all measures are consistently strong, and progress is not as impressive as in the main school.
- Students understand important mathematical concepts and show very positive attitudes to their work. They tackle problems readily and persevere when they encounter difficulties. They are ready to 'have a go' even when they are unsure and, as a consequence, they learn from their mistakes.

Teaching in mathematics is outstanding.

- Teaching is consistently good and some is outstanding. As a result, all groups of students make rapid progress in acquiring the knowledge and skills they need for higher-level work.
- Teaching is rooted in the development of students' conceptual understanding. It enables students to reason mathematically and discuss their ideas, as well as to explain what they understand and where they may be having difficulties.
- Teachers make sure that they justify mathematical results. They provide students with regular opportunities to work on extended problems, in which they apply their learning and use skills drawn from different areas of mathematics. Discussion and problem solving are at the core of their learning.
- In lessons, teachers generally assess students' progress well, often using mini-whiteboards to elicit responses from all students in the class.

The curriculum in mathematics is outstanding.

- The curriculum meets students' needs very well. Schemes of work promote problem-solving and investigative approaches and lead to consistently high achievement at GCSE. A growing number of electronic links give access to teaching materials that promote conceptual understanding very effectively.
- Students, including those in the sixth form, appreciate the additional small-group support that is available during registration and after school. Students benefit from a range of enrichment activities, including mathematics competitions and challenges, a Year 10 mathematics day and an optional Year 7 residential course.

- Involvement as a pilot school in a curriculum development project has helped teachers to use with confidence a range of teaching materials that promote problem-solving skills; this has had a positive impact on students' learning.
- Leaders recognise that the initiative introduced in 2013 to enter students for GCSE mathematics early may have led to fewer students gaining the very highest grades. The school no longer uses early entry.
- In the sixth form, mathematics is one of the three most popular subjects at advanced level. Further mathematics is available and additional support is provided for the small number of students who enter the sixth form without a grade C or above in GCSE mathematics.

Leadership and management of mathematics are outstanding.

- The last three years show high standards being maintained and, in some areas, improved. For example, the proportion of students making the expected progress from Key Stage 2 to Key stage 4 has risen steadily. Improvements in the sixth form are more uneven.
- Self-evaluation is realistic and appropriately self-critical, even when students' achievements are high. Improvement planning focuses on activities to complete but would benefit from targets that are more tightly linked to improvements in provision and students' outcomes.
- Teachers work well as a team and value the opportunity to share ideas and try out new teaching materials. While teachers share a philosophy of what constitutes good practice and share common approaches to teaching particular topics, this does not come through strongly in the departmental documentation.
- Teachers' professional development includes whole-school priorities, such as teaching at advanced level, and following areas of individual interest. Teachers value highly their involvement with the Further Mathematics Support Programme.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising achievement in the sixth form to match that in the main school.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop mathematics in the school.

As explained previously, this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

Paul Chambers
Her Majesty's Inspector