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Mr A Bridson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Bridson

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 22 and 23 January 2014 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 nine other lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics requires improvement.

Achievement in mathematics requires improvement.

- Attainment is broadly average, with the proportion of students gaining a GCSE grade C or above in 2013 almost identical to the national average. The proportion of students gaining the highest A* and A grades has risen steadily since 2011 and now it, too, is close to the national average.
- Most progress measures are in line with national norms. For example, the proportion of students making the expected progress in 2013 was 68%, compared with a national figure of 70%. The proportion exceeding the expected progress is rising but remains below average. The school's data show that more students are in line to make good progress than in previous years.
- The most able students achieve in line with similar students nationally. Differences in performance between different groups of students are mostly small. However, while current students are making better progress,

in recent years, disabled students, those with special educational needs and the least able have achieved less well than other groups.

- Gaps in measures of attainment and progress between those students known to be eligible for free school meals and other students have narrowed. However, the attainment gap remains nearly one and a half GCSE grades, which is wider than the gap found nationally.
- Students' achievement in the sixth form is good. While some cohorts are small and results vary, most recent measures of progress exceed national norms.
- Students show positive attitudes to mathematics and behave well. They engage positively with the work they are asked to do. They are more comfortable with one-step questions than with extended questions that provide less guidance. An example of this is how they learn algebraic techniques effectively but, when faced with applying algebra to solve problems, they tend to work informally rather than use the techniques they have learnt.

Teaching in mathematics requires improvement.

- While most teaching has an appropriate focus on developing students' conceptual understanding, some emphasises routines and procedures too much.
- Teachers organise their lessons well. They form positive relationships, which contribute to maintaining a calm working atmosphere in lessons. They are beginning to cater more effectively for different levels of ability within the class.
- The use of in-class assessment and marking varies. In the more successful lessons, teachers gauge students' understanding and progress well and adapt their teaching accordingly. In a few lessons, teachers miss where individual students are having difficulties. Although the use of self-assessment remains uneven, staff are beginning to provide more opportunities for students to assess their own progress.

The curriculum in mathematics requires improvement.

- The curriculum is developing but has yet to lead to good achievement for students. The schemes of work in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form follow appropriately the specifications of the examination boards. A recently revised Key Stage 3 scheme of work, which is based on a published scheme, puts more emphasis on developing students' problem-solving skills. While the change has helped teachers to structure their planning more effectively, the scheme's impact on improving students' problem solving is, as yet, limited.
- All students in Year 11 enter GCSE and most gain a grade G or above. A policy of early entry for GCSE mathematics has been reviewed and will not be used for future cohorts. Evaluation of an initiative to enter a small number of students for GCSE statistics showed it did not work well so it has been discontinued after one year.

- The good sixth-form curriculum includes the opportunity for students to study further mathematics and classes to support those students yet to achieve a grade C or above at GCSE. Growing numbers of students are choosing to study advanced-level mathematics.

Leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- Measures of attainment and progress are being at least maintained and several are improving. For example, the proportion of students exceeding the expected progress is on an upward trend and the proportion gaining the highest A* and A grades at GCSE has nearly doubled in two years. The school has restructured the way that teaching assistants support learning and, as a result, the progress of disabled students and those with special educational needs has improved.
- The school's leaders have placed a high priority on improving provision and outcomes in mathematics. The department has benefited from additional staffing this year and plans for additional curricular time next year are at an advanced stage. The head of department provides good leadership.
- An extensive programme of staff development, including for the teaching assistants attached to mathematics, has had a positive impact on the quality of teaching in the department. The school's evidence shows that more teaching is good or better than in the past. To aid consistency, the department would benefit from discussing and agreeing the features of good teaching that they wish to promote.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that all teaching gives appropriate weight to developing students' conceptual understanding as well as their procedural fluency
- consolidating and building on recent improvements in students' achievement, particularly that of students known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium, less able students, disabled students and those with special educational needs
- making sure that the additional emphasis on problem-solving suggested in the Key Stage 3 scheme of work is embedded in practice.

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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Paul Chambers
Her Majesty's Inspector