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Mr D Sutton
Principal
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Dear Mr Sutton

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 17 and 18 February 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; observation of 11 lessons, three jointly with subject leaders; shorter visits to four other lessons, accompanied by a senior leader, and two brief visits to tutor periods.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is outstanding.

Achievement in mathematics is outstanding.

- Students join the academy having attained well-below-average results in national tests at primary school. By the end of Key Stage 4, their attainment is high. Most students make at least the expected progress from their starting points and a larger proportion than the national figure makes better-than-expected progress.
- Mathematics is becoming a very popular subject at A level and achievement is good. At AS, achievement is even better with students making exceptional progress.
- Just over a third of students are supported by the pupil premium, which provides extra funding for disadvantaged students. In 2013, students known to be eligible for this funding were almost one GCSE grade behind others. Although slightly wider than the national gap, this has narrowed from 2012. The academy's data for eligible students currently in Year 11

show that the proportion making expected progress or better is increasing and the gap with national is closing rapidly.

- The achievement of students who are disabled or who have special educational needs is good. In 2013, those supported at 'school action plus' achieved less well than other groups with special educational needs in the academy. Outcomes are improving due to the joint support provided within mathematics and through other specialist support staff.
- Early indications for 2014 point to a further improvement in outcomes, particularly for the most-able students, with an increase in the proportion likely to gain the highest A* and A grades. The introduction of a course in further mathematics is providing appropriate challenge for these students as they deepen their understanding of mathematics. More middle-ability students are now following the higher tier specification; students have high aspirations to achieve above a grade C.
- Students demonstrate understanding of mathematical concepts and are used to sharing their ideas with others to explain their solutions to problems. Orally, this is highly developed and students communicate ideas with confidence and relish responding to challenges from teachers or other students. In written work, this is less well developed and students are sometimes reluctant to show a formal layout to support their reasoning.
- Students are highly positive about their learning. They enjoy their lessons and work very well together. Students readily ask questions to improve their understanding and value the support they receive from teachers.

Teaching in mathematics is outstanding.

- Students make rapid progress as a result of teaching over time which is consistently good and an increasing proportion that is outstanding.
- Outstanding teaching was characterised by teachers using their excellent subject knowledge to plan appropriately challenging activities which keep students actively engaged in their learning. Students applied their knowledge to new situations, supported by teachers' skilful use of questions to encourage deeper thought. Frequent use of mini-whiteboards enabled teachers to check responses as the lesson progressed and the intervention which followed was quick to address misconceptions.
- The quality of marking is strong. Teachers follow consistently the academy's policy of regular 'deep' marking through which strengths in students' work are identified together with a diagnosis of problems and planned, specific action that students need to carry out to 'close the gap' in knowledge, skills or understanding. Students like this system but would also like teachers to give them more regular feedback during the lesson as to what they need to do to improve.

The curriculum in mathematics is outstanding.

- The curriculum meets the needs of students well. New Key Stage 3 schemes of work are being written to acknowledge better the knowledge, skills and understanding already developed in the six partner primary

schools. This should ensure no time is wasted through unnecessary repetition of topics already covered to sufficient depth.

- Students' conceptual development is promoted through planned opportunities to solve problems and to investigate within mathematics. These activities gradually increase in difficulty to ensure learning builds on students' starting points.
- Students benefit from a range of enrichment activities, for example, entry into national mathematics competitions, 'KS3 Maths Club', and a recent residential visit to Disneyland Paris with a mathematics theme. Whole-academy initiatives include a consistent approach towards written calculation methods through the calculation policy and the 'Mathematics across the Curriculum' programme during form time, although not all students find the activities challenging.

Leadership and management of mathematics are outstanding.

- Teachers work exceptionally well together as a team under the guidance of the three leaders of mathematics. Self-evaluation is accurate and is based on a rigorous process of monitoring that includes use of assessment information, moderation of students' work and observations of teaching.
- Professional development is at the heart of improving teaching and promoting better learning. Mathematics and science are paired together as part of science, technology, engineering and technology initiatives. Teachers recently took part in an 'open classroom' week when they could visit each other's classrooms to observe teaching and share good practice. Teachers are highly reflective and work hard to improve their teaching.
- The department's capacity to improve is outstanding. The academy is creative in the way it recruits only the best mathematics teachers; which it does through teachers' outreach work with local universities where they contribute to post graduate certificate in education courses. Trainees work with groups of the academy's students, organising a carousel of intervention and support programmes. This enables academy leaders to identify talented individuals early, in the recruitment process.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improve teaching so that more is outstanding
- making sure that mathematical activities used in form time are really challenging for all students.

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

Denah Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector