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Ms F McGarry
Headteacher
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Dear Ms McGarry

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 4 and 5 March 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 with shorter visits to an additional 10 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is outstanding.

Achievement in mathematics is outstanding.

- Attainment is well above average. For example, in 2013, the proportion of students gaining the highest A* and A grades was 32%, compared with a national average of just under 19%.
- Students make outstanding progress. From their different starting points, the proportions of students making the expected progress are high. Similarly, the proportions of students exceeding the expected progress are high. The school's records, together with the progress seen during the inspection, indicate that high levels of achievement are being sustained.
- Students known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium make excellent progress. In 2013, the gap between their attainment and that of other students was approximately half a GCSE grade. Male and female students achieve equally well.

- The progress of the small number of disabled students and those with special educational needs fluctuates over time but is good overall.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good and improving. Attainment is above average and students make good progress from their various starting points.
- Students have excellent attitudes to mathematics. They work well individually or in groups and persevere when faced with challenges. They show very good skills in tackling multi-step problems or problems that are presented in an unfamiliar form. Most can explain clearly how they are tackling a problem.

Teaching in mathematics is outstanding.

- Teaching is consistently good with some that is outstanding. As a result, all groups of students make good or better progress in acquiring the knowledge and skills they need for higher-level work.
- Teaching has a consistently strong focus on developing the conceptual understanding necessary for students to work fluently and with confidence. Teachers provide students, including the most able, with consistently high levels of challenge.
- Teachers have strong subject knowledge which helps them to anticipate likely misconceptions, spot students' errors quickly and to answer students' questions accurately.
- Teachers use a variety of approaches and select activities that interest students. They are willing to try new approaches and are currently looking at ways of using tablet computers to strengthen students' learning further.
- Teachers have identified the need to develop their use of marking to encourage students to reflect on their work and/or extend their learning and have begun to do this.

The curriculum in mathematics is outstanding.

- The curriculum is enabling students to achieve outstandingly well. All students in Key Stage 4 study for GCSE mathematics and the most able study additionally for a level 2 certificate in further mathematics. The school's previous policy of entering selected students for GCSE mathematics before the end of Year 11 has now been discontinued.
- In the sixth form, students can study advanced-level mathematics and further mathematics. Students without a grade C or above in GCSE mathematics are given the support they need to improve their grade.
- Schemes of work include a suitable emphasis on problem solving. As well as integrating problem solving into the topics being taught, planned activities include ones that focus specifically on developing students' problem-solving skills.
- Schemes of work provide a useful structure that ensures strong progression in students' learning. Further details are being added to the schemes to enable all staff to benefit more from sharing successful lesson

ideas. Similarly, details about teaching approaches and/or points to emphasise are being expanded to cover more topic areas. This should strengthen the consistency of teaching, especially when new, temporary, or non-specialist teachers are teaching mathematics.

- The school provides a wide range of additional support for targeted students, including in Key Stage 3. This support includes extra classes, small-group and one-to-one tuition, and directed support for individual study using information and communication technology.
- Mathematics is a popular subject in the school. Large and growing numbers are choosing to study mathematics in the sixth form: for example, last year about one third of Year 11 students opted to study AS mathematics.

Leadership and management of mathematics are outstanding.

- The school has successfully built upon previously high GCSE results. All achievement measures are high and many are on an upward trend. Sixth-form results also rose in 2013. The gap between progress measures for students known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium and that of other students has narrowed considerably.
- Staff value the school's support for their professional development, whether through whole-school training, departmental discussions or external contacts.
- Leaders and managers give high priority to improving provision for mathematics in the school. A recent initiative to provide additional staffing in Key Stage 3 has led to improved progress for a target group of students. Further additional staffing is planned for next year.
- Self-evaluation is accurate although, in the sixth form, the evaluation takes too little account of progress measures and success rates in comparison with national figures.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- extending the guidance offered in some sections of the schemes of work on teaching approaches or points to emphasise.

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