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Ms J Rose  
Principal  
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Dear Ms Rose

### **Ofsted 2014–15 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 25 and 26 June 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 seven lessons, and shorter visits to two other lessons. Some observations were conducted jointly with senior staff.

### **The overall effectiveness of mathematics requires improvement.**

#### **Achievement in mathematics requires improvement.**

- Standards are improving in mathematics in most year groups, due to better teaching. In 2012/13, too few students made adequate progress by the end of Year 11; significantly more are expected to have done so this year. This better progress is anticipated to improve the proportion of students obtaining grade C or better by around 10%, to become near the national average.
- Previously, too few students who struggled with mathematics when they joined in Year 7 made the progress expected of them by the end of Key Stage 4. However, the academy's work this year to help those Year 7 students who arrived with low Key Stage 2 results to catch up is proving successful, and many of them have made good progress so far.

- Concerns remain about the progress of a significant minority of students in Year 8. The department is taking urgent steps to address this.
- Students eligible for the Pupil Premium are beginning to make the more rapid progress required to ensure that the gap between their achievement and that of other students closes.
- Students demonstrate a willingness to learn, and they value their learning in mathematics. The majority behave cooperatively in lessons but too many can lose their concentration quite easily. Some do not often challenge their grasp of the work or contribute whole-heartedly to class discussions.

### **Teaching in mathematics requires improvement.**

- Although all of the teaching in the department is at least adequate, too little offers high levels of challenge and stimulation to students. Higher expectations of students' achievement are not yet translating into probing questioning and genuinely challenging work in enough lessons to secure stronger learning over time.
- The best teaching presents mathematical ideas in interesting and real contexts. In one lesson observed, students responded well to making adjustments to the position and orientation of pieces in a geometric game to improve their understanding of reflections, translations and rotations.
- Too often, however, an over-reliance on worksheets displaces high quality discussion that might explore key ideas and how they link with previous learning. While this worksheet approach supports learning of mathematical techniques and facts, it fails to excite and motivate students to deepen their grasp of important mathematical concepts.
- Students' work is marked more regularly and to a higher standard than previously. Several teachers are using marking to offer challenge, extend understanding and address specific problems. Their students respond well.

### **The curriculum in mathematics requires improvement.**

- The current curriculum has been closely supported by the sponsors, Academies Enterprise Trust (AET), in response to the need to take a firm lead on improving the quality of teaching and learning. The new curriculum structure is supporting improvements but it is not yet providing a rich diet for students.
- Teachers benefit from the current practice of teaching one area of mathematics at a time simultaneously across Years 7 to 10 because they can plan together, share ideas and develop resources cooperatively. This has contributed to the elimination of inadequate teaching. However, it is not yet supporting the development of consistently good or outstanding practice because too few links and connections are made between the various areas. Moreover, problem solving, and other opportunities to develop high level mathematical reasoning, are underemphasised.
- The academy is working closely with its sponsors to improve the curriculum and has well-established plans to broaden its appeal and to

increase use of practical apparatus and information communication technology. At the same time, clearer routes through the material to offer more challenge to all groups of students are planned.

- Good links have been forged between mathematics and other subjects to encourage the development of numeracy skills across the academy. Students undertake some useful work in mathematical problem solving in tutor times.

### **Leadership and management of mathematics are good.**

- Mathematics currently has no head of department; one of the Vice Principals leads the subject. He is very well supported by an adviser from AET and together they are bringing about the rapid and secure improvements required. Morale in the department is now good.
- Students' achievement in mathematics is monitored closely and analysed thoroughly. This information is used well to check the success of changes taking place in the curriculum and to identify the need for interventions to support better progress by specific groups.
- The quality of teaching is monitored diligently. Systems to improve it are thorough and rigorous and staff feel well supported. Clear links exist between the quality of teaching and the provision of appropriate training. Meetings are used very well to focus on how certain teaching approaches and specific resources can improve students' learning. Frequent checks on the quality of marking and feedback have resulted in improvements.
- Development planning is focused on the right priorities. Progress against key issues is monitored very closely and leaders respond rapidly to the need to intervene to provide any support needed.

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

- developing more teaching that offers high levels of challenge and support to students and results in good or outstanding learning
- bringing more investigative and problem-solving work into lessons, in contexts that interest students and drawing on approaches that deepen their conceptual understanding
- improving the progress of
  - some Year 8 students, to bring them up to the standard expected
  - students who are eligible for the Pupil Premium to close more rapidly the gap between their attainment and other students' attainment.

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

**Alan Taylor-Bennett**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**