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Mr D Hill
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hill

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 7 and 8 July 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 11 parts of lessons. At the time of the inspection, only students from Key Stage 3 were in school.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics requires improvement.

Achievement in mathematics requires improvement.

- Attainment is above average. For example, the average point score at GCSE was significantly above average in both 2012 and 2013.
- Measures of students' progress have fluctuated in recent years. The school has yet to establish a pattern of favourable comparison with national averages from students' various starting points. The school's data show that the current Year 11 students are set to make better progress than those who left in 2013.
- Students known to be entitled to the pupil premium make broadly similar progress to other groups. In 2013, their attainment was behind that of other students by approximately three quarters of a GCSE grade.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs achieve in line with other groups.

- Students tackle readily the tasks they are set and are not afraid to make mistakes while building their understanding. They display good understanding of transformations. Some younger students are still developing confidence in using algebraic notation. While most students have positive attitudes to work, a few take insufficient care with presentation, such as when drawing diagrams.

Teaching in mathematics requires improvement.

- Most teaching gives an appropriate emphasis to developing students' conceptual understanding. While teaching focuses on key mathematical ideas and methods, not all justifies fully the results that students are learning to use and apply.
- Teachers plan lessons generally to include tasks that support students' learning well. Nevertheless, the worksheets in use vary in quality; some provide activities that interest students and help them to consolidate their learning; others give too much emphasis to routine and/or repetitive questions. This contributes to students' lack of confidence when faced with questions presented in an unfamiliar form.
- Students benefit from the opportunity to select tasks that suit their level of confidence and understanding. They enjoy using information and communication technology regularly to help learn mathematics.
- Teachers provide useful feedback to students on how they can improve their work and are beginning to expect and monitor the response from students. Some marking gives too little attention to students' accurate use of mathematical vocabulary.

The curriculum in mathematics requires improvement.

- The schemes of work are well organised. They summarise the expected teaching and include reference to possible resources, including textbooks, worksheets and hyperlinks to web-based materials. Both schemes make appropriate reference to activities that focus on developing students' problem-solving skills but these activities are not used consistently across the department.
- Students benefit from whole-school 'Enriching and Enhancing Learning' days, where they work in groups on extended problems.
- Staff provide a good range of additional support for students. In Key Stage 3, the one-to-one support sessions have had a positive impact on students' confidence. The school's data show that additional support sessions before and after school, together with one-to-one and small-group sessions, have contributed to better GCSE outcomes for current Year 11 students. Parents and students are very positive about the out-of-class support offered by members of the department.

Leadership and management of mathematics require improvement.

- In recent years, GCSE results have fluctuated rather than showing a steady improvement. However, clear improvements over time are evident

in the achievement of students known to be entitled to the pupil premium and, as a consequence, the gap has narrowed between their progress and that of other students.

- Leaders have a thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the department and how teaching can be improved. The school's observations show that teachers are providing work that matches students' ability better than previously and that the quality of marking has improved. The written self-evaluation gives too little emphasis to progress measures and how these compare with national figures.
- Leaders and managers appreciate the need to develop a more consistent approach to developing students' problem-solving skills and have appropriate plans to do this.
- Managers recognised that a gap was developing between the progress of boys and girls. In response, they reorganised some of the teaching groups in Year 10 and early indications are that considerably more boys are now making the expected progress and that the gap has narrowed.
- Teachers benefit from opportunities to develop their practice through attending sessions led by school colleagues or experts from outside. They appreciate the opportunity to select areas of focus that link in with their appraisal targets.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- establishing a pattern where, from their various starting points, students make progress that matches or exceeds national figures
- developing a core of activities that focus on developing students' problem-solving skills, and ensuring that they are used consistently across the department
- ensuring that
 - teachers give a higher priority to developing students' use of mathematical vocabulary
 - all teaching justifies fully the mathematics that underpins the methods being taught.

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