

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Miss T Amos
Headteacher
Great Torrington School
Calvesford Road
Torrington
Devon
EX38 7DJ

Dear Miss Amos

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 October 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: meetings with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; observation of six lessons, two undertaken jointly with the team leader for mathematics, and shorter visits to five further lessons, including to two 'Lbacc' lessons in Year 7.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- You and your senior team have succeeded in developing a culture of learning throughout the school. As a result, the members of the mathematics team, who are all subject specialists, are receptive to new ideas, flexible in their approach and keen to innovate. Where necessary, prompt and robust action is taken to tackle any instances of weaker teaching.
- Management of the subject is highly effective and very well organised, and the track record of students' achievement in the subject is strong. The team leader and assistant team leader for mathematics, who are both relatively new to their posts, are developing their skills in leading

improvements to teaching more effectively. For example, although regular and detailed analyses of students' responses to assessments are carried out, these analyses are not used systematically to target where teaching could be adapted and improved.

- Regular checks on teaching and an annual in-depth review provide a secure basis for further development, although do not always pinpoint clearly how students' reasoning skills and conceptual understanding could be improved. Action is being taken to strengthen the curriculum in readiness for the demands of the new examination specifications in Key Stage 4.

The curriculum in mathematics is good.

- The mathematics curriculum is well matched to students' needs and aspirations, particularly the most able. The quality of teaching and examination choices in Key Stage 4 ensure that these students are well prepared for advanced-level courses when they leave school.
- Guidance is provided for teachers, both formally and informally, to support improvements to teaching. While this identifies a good range of tasks and resources for teachers, the guidance provided to improve students' understanding of the mathematics they learn is less well developed.
- Increasingly effective links are made with the curriculum in other areas of the school, particularly for younger students. This is helping to develop students' skills in collaboration, communication and problem solving. Students enjoy working on projects where they can apply their skills and knowledge in practical situations, such as budgeting for a holiday.

Teaching in mathematics is good.

- Teaching reflects high expectations of students' achievement. Inspection evidence shows that students learn mathematics through a good range of interesting tasks and activities and are challenged by their teachers to think and work hard. However, some teaching does not always make the best use of the new 100-minute lesson structure to broaden and deepen students' learning more effectively.
- Teachers know their students very well, and adapt their teaching to speed up or consolidate learning as needed. They provide a good range of interesting and challenging problems for students to solve and this helps to build up students' confidence when faced with unfamiliar or unusual contexts. However, teaching varies in how well it builds up students' reasoning skills and develops their deeper understanding of the techniques and methods they learn. This is the chief reason why teaching is not yet outstanding.
- The provision of additional support for students, through assessment, intervention and mentoring is very effective, particularly in Key Stage 4. This support helped Year 11 students in particular to achieve highly in their GCSE examinations in 2014.

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- All groups of students make good progress in mathematics. The most-able students in particular achieve well. Most students enjoy their lessons and work hard in response to the challenging teaching they receive. Given students' starting points when they join the school, a larger proportion than expected consistently secure the highest grades at GCSE.
- The teaching and support provided for lower-attaining students, disadvantaged students, and those supported through the Year 7 catch-up funding, are also effective in helping these students to make good progress. The achievement of boys and girls shows little difference.
- Students make faster progress in Key Stage 4 than they do in Key Stage 3. This is because teaching, including through targeted intervention and support, is more consistently effective for older students. Not all teaching in Years 7 and 8 focuses sufficiently on building students' reasoning skills or helps them to develop a more secure understanding of the key ideas and concepts they will need.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the consistency with which all teaching develops students' ability to reason through and understand the mathematical skills and concepts they learn by:
 - making sure all teaching focuses more effectively on these aspects
 - ensuring leaders' checks identify more clearly the impact of teaching on students' understanding and how it can be improved
 - strengthening the quality of the guidance provided to staff to help them develop students' reasoning skills and conceptual understanding
 - using the analysis of assessment information to prioritise those areas of the curriculum where teaching can be improved.

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

Lee Northern
Her Majesty's Inspector