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Mr P Monk
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Monk

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 2 and 3 February 2015 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 a local authority adviser, staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and visits to 15 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- The work of the department has improved rapidly over the last two years as a result of strong leadership, effective teamwork and the drive and determination of the mathematics staff. Staffing changes, reallocation of responsibilities, more robust quality systems and support from local authority advisers have contributed to the improvement. Performance management is much tighter and teachers held more accountable. Learning walks are used well to set targets for individual staff. Good support helps teachers to improve their practice but, if necessary, leaders do not balk at taking tough decisions.
- The new senior leader who has responsibility for mathematics, business and information technology is a mathematician. He came from an outstanding school and has brought fresh ideas and high expectations. He

has introduced a very rigorous system of testing in Year 11 that is used well to plan lessons, set individual homework tasks and target interventions. The head of mathematics is recognised across the school as a highly skilled practitioner and is developing teaching very effectively. The new leader of sixth-form mathematics has introduced robust systems that are now being used across other subjects.

- A very good blend of expertise within the department is used well. Regular team meetings, informal sharing of good practice and collaborative work on the new curriculum ensure that everyone is abreast of developments. Resources are plentiful and shared willingly but they are spread around and not easily accessible.

The curriculum in mathematics is good.

- The departmental team is working closely together to develop a coherent curriculum that links well to Key Stage 2 and carries through to Key Stage 5. The new national curriculum has been introduced at Key Stage 3. In preparation, the head of mathematics worked with local primary schools helping to teach higher-level topics and devising ways to ease the transition from Year 6 to 7 so that momentum is not lost.
- Preparation for the new GCSE is well advanced; a scheme of work has been developed for Year 9 and teaching is underway. The scheme of work is being enhanced as further information and support materials become available. Proposed changes at A level are monitored closely.
- The team has productive links with the local teaching school and universities. It also works with other subjects in school and pupil premium money has been used to fund joint summer schools.
- Well-targeted interventions and the range of informal support are good. Students say that support in mathematics is the best in school.

Teaching in mathematics is good.

- All teachers are subject specialists and use their mathematical knowledge well to develop students' understanding and to unpick misconceptions. They build effectively on existing understanding, backtrack if necessary and deliver new learning in well-planned steps. A wide range of resources and activities engage interest effectively and foster deeper understanding. Lessons move at a good pace.
- Teachers have good questioning skills. They ask probing questions, are not afraid to wait for an answer and will ask follow-up questions as a prompt or to extend learning. In the most effective lessons, questions are used very well to recap and consolidate learning both during and at the end of the session.
- Detailed information about students' achievement is used well to pitch work at an appropriate level, direct questions and cater for individuals' needs.
- Teaching assistants work effectively with teachers. One teaching assistant is a qualified mathematics teacher and is deployed well with small groups.

- Marking and feedback are good and improving. Teachers mark regularly and write helpful comments but the new system that gives students time to reflect and act on advice is not yet fully embedded and consistent.

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- In lessons, students are willing to put forward solutions for discussion. They do not shy away from non-routine questions and many find them invigorating. Students are becoming increasingly self-reliant. Students' books show that they are working well and developing a good range of skills. The quality of work is improving quickly.
- Achievement at the end of Key Stage 4 improved in 2014. The percentage of students achieving a GCSE grade C or above increased and the number of grade A*/A passes rose considerably. The gap in achievement between disadvantaged and other students is narrower than the national figure and reduced overall in 2014 although not for lower-attaining students. The school's internal data for this year show that achievement is improving well in Key Stages 3 and 4 and gaps in achievement are closing across the ability range.
- Sixth-form achievement dipped in 2014 but early indications are that much tighter monitoring and swifter interventions are raising achievement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that early improvements in achievement in the sixth form lead to better examination results in the summer
- creating a central bank of resources to give teachers easy access to all those available.

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

Jan Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector