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Mr A Larkin
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Dear Mr Larkin

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 4 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 staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observations in lessons. These observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- Senior leaders have recently appointed a subject leader who teaches all of the mathematics lessons at Key Stages 3 and 4. Prior to this, senior leaders took very effective action to minimise the impact of the vacancy on the mathematical achievement of students thereby ensuring they made good progress.
- Following his appointment in January 2015 the new subject leader has developed a good understanding of what needs to be done in order to strengthen mathematics provision within the academy. He has reviewed the mathematics policy. An action plan details what will be done and when. This includes training for staff on the improvement of numeracy

skills through other curriculum areas, and the provision of two whole-school numeracy project days.

- Senior leaders, alongside the subject leader, have identified local schools and a specialist leader in education, who can provide support and challenge for the new leader.

The curriculum in mathematics is good.

- Senior leaders have agreed to implement the national curriculum in mathematics. At Key Stage 2, the aims of the new curriculum are evident in teaching, with pupils developing their mathematical fluency, problem-solving and reasoning skills through carefully selected activities appropriate to their age and prior attainment.
- At Key Stage 3, however, the new curriculum is not embedded. Changes in staffing have resulted in a focus on the development of skills rather than the deepening of mathematical understanding. The curriculum has been supplemented by individual interventions, delivered by trained support staff. These have had a positive impact on students' progress.
- Older students work towards a GCSE in mathematics. Leaders have recognised that changes in the assessment process at Key Stage 4 pose a challenge for their students, who all have emotional, social and mental health difficulties, and have put appropriate measures in place to support students. The subject leader plans to introduce accreditation at Entry Level for Year 9 students. This will ensure that all students experience success and gain a nationally recognised qualification in mathematics. Leaders predict that in 2015 all students in Year 11 will gain GCSE at grade F or above.

Teaching in mathematics is good.

- At Key Stage 2, the teaching of mathematics is very strong. Staff members weave together skilfully activities that develop students' understanding of mathematics alongside addressing their special educational needs in terms of social and emotional development. In one observed lesson, students worked together in teams, supported by a member of staff, to solve a mathematical problem. Each student had a clue to the solution, but they had to work together in order to solve the problem. Students were motivated to participate because the teacher made clear links between what they were learning and real life, in this case relating the calculation of perimeter to the work of a fencing company. Scrutiny of students' books showed that activities involving similarly deep thinking take place on a regular basis.
- At Key Stages 3 and 4, teaching has been good over time because leaders acted swiftly to ensure consistency for students whilst they sought a new subject leader. Leaders took time to make sure that temporary cover arrangements, and the permanent arrangements now in place, were of sufficient quality. They ensured that additional capacity was provided through the implementation of a comprehensive support programme for students who started to struggle, enabling them to catch up quickly.

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Students join the academy at various stages of their education. Currently, the academy caters for students from Year 5 to Year 11. All students have special educational needs relating to social, emotional and mental health needs. Consequently, students are working below the levels that would normally be expected for their age.
- In 2014, a high proportion of students in Years 5 to 9 made expected progress, or above expected progress in mathematics. This is because senior leaders ensured that the teaching of mathematics was stabilised through the appointment of an effective temporary teacher. They also ensured that additional support was provided for students that started to fall behind.
- Students in Key Stage 4 also made good progress. However, their progress, particularly in relation to mathematical understanding, was not always reflected in their GCSE results in 2014. Several students did not attend all of the examinations and therefore received a lower grade than had been predicted.
- The academy tracks the progress of students both individually and as groups. Disadvantaged students, who make up around two thirds of the academy, make similar progress to their peers.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the mathematics curriculum at Key Stage 3 is fully embedded and maximises opportunities for the development of students' mathematical fluency, reasoning and problem-solving skills
- increasing the rate of students' progress through ensuring teaching is of a consistently high quality.

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

Gaynor Roberts
Her Majesty's Inspector