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Mr P Jenkins  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Jenkins

### **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 9 and 10 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, observation of six lessons, two of which were undertaken jointly with senior staff, and shorter visits to eight other lessons.

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

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

- The new head of department has an accurate view of the department's strengths and development needs. She has a clear sense of how to take the work of the department forward, giving appropriate priority to making sure that all teaching achieves a better balance between securing students' technical skills and developing their mathematical reasoning.
- Significant staffing shortages this year have been managed well, minimising the adverse impact on students' learning of unfilled vacancies and teachers' absence. Those teachers of other subjects who provide some mathematics teaching in Key Stage 3 are paired with a member of the mathematics department, which helps to ensure that their contributions are well organised and supported.
- Development planning identifies the important issues but does not spell out clearly enough what actions will be undertaken, when and by whom, in order to address them. Some, but not all, aspects of the implementation of the

new National Curriculum are covered. However, the head of department has a good grasp of what needs doing. For example, key decisions have been taken around what will constitute good schemes of work for current Key Stage 3 students from September 2015, and planning for assessment is based appropriately on students' mastery of key concepts in each topic.

- Regular monitoring and evaluation of the work of the department has continued this year despite the need for the head of department to spend a relatively high proportion of time teaching due to staff shortages. Lesson observations and feedback contribute well to teachers' professional development.
- Fruitful links with some partner primary schools are supporting a developing understanding of teaching and learning in mathematics in Key Stages 1 and 2. Links with local secondary schools are assisting with curriculum development in Key Stages 3 and 4.

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

- Current schemes of work do not ensure that students spend long enough on each topic to develop a good understanding of the key concepts involved, and to explore links between topics. Vacancies in the department mean that most Key Stage 3 students have two mathematics teachers, each covering a different strand of the subject.
- The department has a range of resources for teachers to draw upon, including sets of textbooks and worksheets. These are useful, but they are not yet associated clearly enough with schemes of work to guarantee coherence in students' experiences across different groups. The head of department has plans to develop agreed strategies for learning in each topic in every year group.
- Students have little opportunity to use information and communication technology to support their learning in mathematics.
- Opportunities to develop problem-solving skills are often limited to 'extension' or 'challenge' activities for those students who move through work more quickly and successfully. This means that not everyone has the chance to acquire these important skills and to see the real point of some of the mathematics they learn. The head of department is well aware of this and wants to involve more problem solving in lessons.
- Able mathematicians follow additional mathematics as a GCSE option. The timetable does not allow this to be coordinated with their GCSE mathematics course, so students do not always tackle work in the right sequence. Some students also have the opportunity to acquire a certificate in algebra.

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

- Some teaching emphasises students' deep understanding of topics and encourages students to make connections between ideas. Too much, however, is restricted to teaching a range of specific mathematical techniques successfully, which students then apply in straightforward situations, without moving on to more complex questions.

- The best teaching constantly checks the quality and the nature of students' understanding of the work, usually by asking probing questions and thereby obtaining instant feedback. While nearly all teaching involves the clear presentation of ideas to students, not all obtains, and responds to, high-quality information about how they are learning.
- The quality of teachers' marking and written feedback is too variable across the department. The best identifies students' good mathematical insights and addresses misconceptions. Much simply checks that classwork and homework has been done and that students are meeting basic requirements regarding layout and checking answers regularly.

### **Achievement in mathematics is good.**

- Students arrive with above-average Key Stage 2 results in mathematics. Over the last few years, a high proportion has achieved good grades in GCSE mathematics. A large majority make at least the progress expected of them, and many students make good progress.
- The gap between the attainment of disadvantaged students and others has been unacceptably large previously. It reduced to the equivalent of one GCSE grade in 2014. The progress of disadvantaged students is currently prioritised by the department, and it is improving.
- Students with disabilities or special educational needs are supported well and often make the progress expected.
- Behaviour is good in mathematics. Students listen carefully to teachers' explanations and try hard with their work. However, they rarely contribute their own thinking, or challenge their own and others' grasp of the work.

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

- ensuring that the department has a full complement of well-qualified mathematics teachers as soon as possible
- using the new schemes of work to:
  - promote students' better mathematical reasoning and deeper grasp of key concepts, including through applying their knowledge and skills to problem-solving activities
  - ensure more consistency in learning across groups
- making sure that marking gives students high-quality feedback which enables them to improve their work.

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

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