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17 March 2015

Mr A Webster
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Webster

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 and 5 March 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: meetings with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; observation of six lessons, five undertaken jointly with leaders from the school, and shorter visits to five further lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics requires improvement.

Leadership and management of mathematics require improvement.

- You, your senior leaders, and the head of mathematics share a clear vision and ambition for mathematics at Park View School. Your evaluation of students' achievement has rightly pinpointed where some students do not achieve as well as they could. For example, you have identified that, while a focus on students attaining at least grade C in GCSE mathematics has met with considerable success in recent years (including for many disadvantaged students), levels of achievement overall have begun to falter and decline.
- Many more-able students, and some who are low-attaining, do not achieve well. Since assuming leadership of the school in September 2014, you have rightly recognised these issues as pressing priorities for the school. You have stopped the practice of early entry to GCSE mathematics.
- Your evaluation of the quality of teaching is equally accurate. However, leaders' checks on teaching are not yet rigorous or robust enough to spur rapid improvement. Records from these checks do not pinpoint precisely

weaknesses in teaching and how they can be improved. In addition, insufficient coherence between improvement planning, checks on the quality of teaching, and the training provided for staff means that teaching is not improving quickly enough.

- Too much reliance is put on senior leaders and the head of mathematics to drive improvement. The contribution of some staff who have leadership responsibility within the mathematics team is weak and is slowing down the pace of developments in the subject. For example, although most staff are keen to speed up improvement, too little team meeting time ends up being devoted to identifying how teaching can be improved.

The curriculum in mathematics requires improvement.

- Considerable headway has been made in ensuring curriculum programmes address the content of the new national curriculum, so that students will learn the necessary knowledge and methods. However, the programmes do not provide enough support and guidance for staff to develop students' deeper learning, reasoning and conceptual understanding. As a result, not all the aims of the new national curriculum in mathematics are being met.
- Frequent assessment, particularly in Key Stage 4, informs a wide-ranging, comprehensive programme of intervention and support which is effective in helping many students to put right important gaps in their learning. The commitment of most staff to this programme, and to students generally, is very high. Despite this, leaders do not check closely enough that teachers' overall assessment of students' attainment is reliable and robust. As a result, leaders cannot be fully confident in the accuracy of teachers' predictions of students' attainment. Leaders have only recently begun to ensure that assessments are benchmarked against national standards.
- The rationale by which some students are assigned to teaching groups is not always fully clear. In a few cases, students are placed in lower-attaining sets on the basis of their first language, rather than their mathematical achievement and potential. The targets set for some students do not challenge them to achieve more highly.

Teaching in mathematics requires improvement.

- The quality of teaching varies considerably across the department. This inconsistency is a barrier to reversing rapidly the trend of declining achievement. It is also the chief reason why teaching is not good.
- This variation is also seen in the presentation of students' work, in their completion of homework tasks, and in the quality and quantity of work they produce. Some teaching does not expect enough from all groups of students, particularly the most-able and low-attaining students.
- Too much teaching does not help students to deepen their understanding of the mathematics they learn. Inspection evidence shows that sometimes they are presented with methods they do not fully grasp or where they simply replicate a series of steps they have been shown. Stronger teaching does not shy away from allowing students to grapple with the underlying

patterns and structures that deepen the quality of their learning in mathematics. The best teaching uses skilful questioning to probe understanding and highlight misconceptions. This is not consistently the case across the subject.

Achievement in mathematics requires improvement.

- Overall achievement has declined in recent years. While some students achieved well at GCSE in 2014, too many students underachieved – particularly those at either end of the ability range. Despite the actions of leaders to address these issues, inspection evidence confirms that this pattern has not yet been reversed.
- Many disadvantaged students achieve well but others do not. While overall rates of progress are higher than for all students nationally, in 2014, the difference between the attainment of disadvantaged students at the school and that of other students nationally was, on average, equivalent to just over one GCSE grade lower for each student. This was chiefly because too many more-able students underachieved, including some who were disadvantaged. In addition, too many disadvantaged students completed Year 11 in 2014 without securing any accreditation in mathematics.
- Progress in lessons varies considerably, reflecting the variability in teaching, and affects achievement most in Key Stage 3. Also, strategies to help students catch up are more effective in Years 10 and 11.
- When given opportunities to do so, most students enjoy discussing their mathematics, working together and sharing their ideas. They like being challenged to think hard, and are usually prepared to 'have a go'. However, too many students have weak problem-solving skills because too little teaching develops this aspect well.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising the overall quality of teaching, and reducing inconsistency, by:
  - providing more effective support and guidance for teachers in securing students' understanding of the mathematics they learn
  - strengthening the impact and coherence of leaders' checks on teaching, improvement planning, and training provided for teachers
- improving the quality and accuracy of assessment information and thereby securing a reliable measure of students' attainment and progress.

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