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Mrs M Marr
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Marr

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 with Alun Williams HMI on 30 June and 1 July 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 evaluation of strengths and weaknesses included: interviews with staff and students; a meeting with the Chair of the Governing Body and two other parents; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of lessons.

Leadership and management of mathematics

- In 2014, students made much less progress at GCSE than they should, particularly students who are disadvantaged, disabled, or have special educational needs. The subject leader has taken action to drive improvements to teaching so that all students are making better progress.
- Priority has been given to improving students' understanding and enjoyment of mathematics through introducing more opportunities for students to talk about mathematics and to share their thinking with others. Teachers work together to plan interesting lesson activities for students.
- The subject leader's accurate view of the quality of teaching is gathered from a range of information including progress data, observations of teaching, checks on students' work and teachers' planning; and students' views on how to improve learning in mathematics.
- An approach to assessment without levels, based upon the new national curriculum, is being developed with partner primary schools. It will be implemented for Years 7, 8 and 9 from September 2015.

The curriculum in mathematics

- The new national curriculum has been introduced for Year 7 and will continue into Year 8 next year. Year 9 students have started the new GCSE course and have studied 'bridging units' in topics such as iterative methods and vectors in readiness for new material at GCSE.
- Recognising that some students were being taught work that was too easy for them, the subject leader has developed new schemes of learning that increase the challenge for all students, including those in the sixth form. The schemes include problem-solving activities and homework tasks that encourage students to think more deeply about mathematics and to extend their learning from the lesson.
- Teachers would benefit from being given further advice on activities recommended for each topic and the approach to use to help to secure students' knowledge, understanding and progression.
- The school operates a compressed two-year Key Stage 3 and an extended three-year Key Stage 4. The most-able students use this extra time to take an additional GCSE in statistics, an option not made available for other students. Although this course adds breadth for the most-able students, it does not provide any greater level of challenge.
- An increasing number of sixth-form students are taking up the opportunity to study mathematics and further mathematics at AS and A level.

Teaching in mathematics

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and use it well to explain work and to engage in challenging dialogue with the most-able students, including in the sixth form where students are keen to ask questions to deepen their understanding.
- Questioning is a strength of teaching; students respond by willingly sharing their ideas with others. They know they are expected to explain their mathematical thinking and do this well. In lessons, teachers identify misconceptions or common errors and are usually quick to address them.
- Checks on students' work in books showed that it is marked well and that teachers apply the school's marking policy consistently. However, the amount of work students have in their books varied widely. At times, students are moved on to new work before they have become fluent. Students told inspectors that, in some lessons, most of their work is done on whiteboards or using worksheets which they do not keep. Students explained that they would prefer to have more work in their books and a greater range of examples to help them with revision.
- Teachers check on the progress students make and use this to identify weaknesses and to plan support to help them to fill gaps in their learning. Teaching assistants, and other adults who support learning, provide help for students in lessons and when working with small groups. However, this sometimes fails to make a difference for the weakest students because it does not make use of mathematical equipment or provide good explanations to help them to develop their understanding of mathematics.

Achievement in mathematics

- Students start in the school with above average attainment based on Key Stage 2 tests and with an above average proportion of most-able students in most year groups. Although students' attainment at GCSE in 2014 was broadly similar to the national average in the percentage gaining at least grade C, fewer students than the national proportion attained the highest A* and A grades. Not enough of the able students made good progress to reach these high grades.
- In 2014, disadvantaged students attained about one and a third GCSE grades below other students in the school, with a similar gap compared with other students nationally. The gap has widened over the last three years. The school's data suggest that it should narrow slightly this year.
- Data provided by the school on Year 11 students' progress indicate that it is set to improve for all students at GCSE in 2015 and that the proportion making expected progress will be much closer to the national average. Despite improving progress, disadvantaged students continue to make much less progress than others in the school, and nationally.
- Sixth-form achievement is improving with data indicating that students are 'on track' to make better progress in 2015, particularly at A level.
- Achievement in lessons presents a stronger picture for current students than seen historically which supports the school's view that the quality of teaching is improving. The most noticeable difference is with the most-able students who are responding well to the higher level of challenge.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- reviewing the use of extra GCSE courses to make sure they provide students with opportunity to deepen their knowledge and understanding of mathematics and to make better progress
- providing all students with sufficient opportunity to consolidate their skills before moving on to other work
- making sure the scheme of learning provides guidance for teachers on good approaches for teaching a topic and the most suitable resources, especially practical equipment, to support low-ability students.

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 Coventry local authority.

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector