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Mr D M Osborne-Town
Headteacher
John Taylor High School
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Dear Mr Osborne-Town

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit, with David Muir HMI, on 30 June and 1 July 2008 to look at work in mathematics. The visit focused on good practice in supporting higher attaining students and the use of information communication technology (ICT) 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 made included: interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work, observation of 14 lessons and a visit to a local primary school.

Features of good practice observed

- Students reach standards which are well above the national average in national Key Stage 3 tests and in GCSE examinations where over a third of students gained an A* or A grade in 2007.
- Students at all levels make excellent progress because they enjoy mathematics and find staff extremely supportive. Students enthuse about the subject and for many it is one of their favourites. Staff have high expectations of their students and this has led to almost three quarters of them being entered for the higher tier GCSE examination this summer. The school delayed the completion of statistics coursework until students had covered all the appropriate work in class and staff feel this helped them produce very good work.

- Large numbers of students study mathematics at A Level with a significant proportion of these also taking further mathematics. Students say they do well because teachers include good explanations of why and how when mathematical concepts are introduced. Students said they felt the derivation of key areas of mathematics from first principles helps their understanding and they enjoy the intellectual rigour.
- The majority of lessons are highly motivating and ensure students make excellent progress. Teachers make good use of the electronic whiteboards, when available, and are very skilled in developing their own resources. These are shared with some other members of the department through informal meetings.
- Students respond enthusiastically to the increasing number of opportunities to use ICT in the computer room to extend their mathematics. However not all staff are confident with ICT and hence some groups do not get the same opportunities.
- The school works effectively to match staff to particular groups of students and to timetable year groups so that staff can work in coherent teams. This also enables some very effective work of triads of teachers to observe each other and bring about improvements to their work.
- New entrants to the profession are supported excellently by the school. They follow a well organised induction programme which extends to the second and third year of their teaching. The school works hard to ensure all entrants become good teachers.
- Very good use is made of the school's specialist status to enhance work with partner primary schools for talented mathematicians and to improve the transfer of pupils when they start in Year 7. In a school survey, pupils said this helped them settle in well and the exchange of curriculum information ensures students generally start from the appropriate level after transfer.
- You, and the senior leadership team, have supported the department by ensuring staffing is closely matched to needs. Additional staff have been deployed to help teachers have suitable time to support each other by working together.

Areas for development

- Extend the expertise within the department to ensure all staff deliver engaging and exciting lessons that motivate students to make consistently excellent progress.
- Enhance the schemes of work by including good teaching ideas, identifying opportunities for using ICT in lessons, and making sure topics on which students are already secure are not included.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop mathematics in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Michael Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector