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Dear Mr Defter

Ofsted 2008-09 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 21 and 22 October 2008 to look at work in mathematics.

As outlined in our initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the effectiveness of the school's approaches to improving the quality of teaching and learning 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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the subject, mathematics, was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in mathematics is good and standards are above average.

- Students enter the school with standards which are broadly average.
- Results at the end of Key Stage 3 have been consistently above national figures and demonstrate good progress.
- Key stage 4 results show that GCSE passes at grades A*-C continue to be well above average and students make good progress from the time they join the school. The proportion of students who gain A* or A grades at GCSE has risen this year. Students with learning difficulties are well supported and make good progress. Those with disabilities say that their needs are well met and they make good progress.

- The results for students taking AS mathematics at the end of Year 11 are excellent and are well above the national average. In 2008 results were slightly lower than those in 2007 when all students gained a pass and 90% gained an A-C grade. This gave results which were very much higher than those seen nationally for older students.
- The school has high expectations of students' work, attitudes and behaviour. This means students enjoy the challenge in lessons and behaviour is extemporary.
- Attitudes to mathematics are excellent for the majority of students who say they enjoy the subject and feel it prepares them well for the future. Those taking additional mathematics enjoyed the way in which they were given responsibility for their own learning in a mature manner.

Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is good.

- Well structured lessons lead to a real atmosphere of enjoyment and engagement with very good relationships between staff and students.
- In the best lessons, students are challenged and the pace of learning is very good. Students say they enjoy lessons when they do not have to 'plough through lots of examples which are easy' but can identify which questions they need to answer and ensure greater personal challenge. However in some lessons progress is only satisfactory because the pace of learning is slower.
- Teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) well in some classes to exemplify and demonstrate work. However this is not consistent. Opportunities to change rooms so that lessons could benefit from the interactivity and dynamism of ICT are not taken.
- Students are expected to mark their own work. This is successful in some classes but other students do not consistently assess their own work, and their teachers do not ensure students know what is right or wrong and give advice on how work can be improved.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is good.

- Schemes of work are well written to ensure students are challenged and that they have consistent opportunities to use and apply their mathematics in all years. The department have developed appropriate tasks to ensure greater creativity in Year 7 and also to support students' functional skills in Key Stage 4.
- Appropriate opportunities for students to use ICT to support mathematics are incorporated in Year 7 schemes of work but the inadequate nature of the accommodation within the school means students do not use ICT in mathematics lessons in other years.
- Good joint work with geography and history means students develop mathematics in other areas of the curriculum. Very good use is made in connecting symmetry and pattern with dance to support the school's specialist performing arts status.
- Effective support for gifted students ensures many of them gain excellent AS results prior to leaving school. Early identification of underperformance, at all levels, allows the school to remediate when there are gaps in students' knowledge.

Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- The subject leader gives a very clear steer and direction to the department so that all staff are well supported. Others with management responsibility within the department support their colleagues well but could take on greater responsibility when developing schemes of work.
- The department analyses carefully results of different groups to ensure all succeed and any areas of underperformance are quickly remedied.
- You have very good systems to monitor the effectiveness of the department, including a comprehensive overview of the quality of teaching and learning through lesson observations. Views of students are sought and these are used to identify how the department can improve further.

Subject issue: the effectiveness of the school's approaches to improving the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics

- The strong support of the subject leader has ensured staff are helped in developing effective teaching techniques and incorporating greater challenge in lessons.
- All staff have been trained on observing lessons and giving feedback and on what constitutes an outstanding lesson.
- Lesson observations identify areas for improvement. Focused support leads to improvements in the overall quality.
- The members of the department work very closely and discuss effective ways of teaching specific topics but these are not always systematically recorded and incorporated into schemes of work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring suitable opportunities for students to use ICT to enhance their work in mathematics in all years
- ensuring the assessment of work suitably identifies mistakes and consistently supports students in remediating errors and advising them how to improve.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector