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Mr C Zimmerman  
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Dear Mr Zimmerman

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 18 and 19 May 2009 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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of four lessons. I observed Year 8 students taking part in an enterprise day and Year 11 students in pre-examination revision sessions.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement in mathematics is good. Standards are average and improving.

- Students start at the school with below average standards. They make good progress and gain broadly average standards by the time they leave at age 16.
- In 2008, Key Stage 3 results continued the upward trend with students making good progress. The school's own assessments in 2009 show standards have continued to rise and are now higher than the previous national average. Standards in using and applying mathematics are assessed by the school and are slightly lower than other areas of mathematics. The progress of students in lessons is consistently good.

- In Key Stage 4, the proportion of students gaining a grade C and above in 2008 was 51.2%. The school's records conservatively estimate this figure to be around 57% for 2009 with an increased proportion of A\* and A grades. Students are also successful with a combined sport and mathematics BTEC course and Financial Services qualifications in money management. These additional qualifications, along with the strong emphasis on independence, prepare students very well for their futures.
- Students demonstrate good attitudes to learning and say they enjoy mathematics because it is fun with interesting lessons. Their behaviour was good.
- Students make a very strong contribution to the local community, including recently helping deliver a 'Making numbers fun' day in the centre of Swindon.

### Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is good.

- The strong emphasis on developing understanding in lessons involves very effective question-and-answer sessions. Activities include good opportunities for students to explain their reasoning. Responses are often used effectively to target future intervention or as a basis for teaching points to eradicate misconceptions.
- Good use is made of interactive whiteboards to motivate and engage students.
- Many activities are planned with opportunities for students to work independently. However, at times, teachers give too much direction on how to complete the work or intervene too quickly and do not allow students sufficient time to persevere and overcome problems themselves.
- Teachers often assess students work well within lessons. Some marking is supportive and identifies how students are to improve. In some books, teachers enter into a learning dialogue with students and set additional questions to consolidate learning or identify where work needs correcting or completing. However this is not consistent across all classes and teachers do not always check to ensure students follow instructions to complete or extend work.

### Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is good

- Schemes of work are effective in supporting staff to deliver good lessons. They often identify good teaching strategies and resources, available via the school intranet. Although many good examples of using and applying mathematics are used in lessons these, along with regular opportunities to develop mathematical skills by using ICT, are not always sufficiently identified within schemes of work
- The school provides an excellent range of additional courses to supplement GCSE. All students complete a qualification for financial capability and many complete a BTEC in sport and mathematics. The school's numeracy group has identified appropriate opportunities for students to use mathematics in other subjects. For example in English, students develop a 'tension' graph to plot the way tension is introduced and altered during a chapter in a set text.
- Students were observed enjoying a curriculum day on enterprise. Good input from the mathematics teachers ensured students remained within budget when developing their alternative Olympic events.
- Good academic support is provided, particularly the preparation of students of all abilities for the GCSE examination.

## Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- The subject leader sets a clear vision for the department which is shared by other staff. Her high expectations of what needs to be done ensures mathematics is seen as a leading department within the school and local area.
- Lesson observations, by the subject leader and by other members of the department, and learning walks with a head of another subject have been used well to identify areas for further development.
- An accurate self-evaluation has identified the key areas for improvement although at times it underestimates the worth of some aspects, considering them common place rather than the examples of good practice which they are.
- You, along with your senior leadership team, make excellent use of the school's specialist status, in particular the very positive contribution mathematics makes to community cohesion. The work with vulnerable adults to ensure they are able to run their small enterprise and help others is very well received, as is the work to support less fortunate children in a township in South Africa.

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

- The school is a key centre for improving mathematics teaching across the whole authority. It works well with other agencies, for example the Specialist School and Academy Trust, to provide suitable professional development for the school's staff and others across the borough.
- You have ensured good use is made of time freed up while Year 11 students are on study leave for teachers to work together to develop the curriculum and update each other on the most effective ways of teaching certain topics.
- Trainee teachers feel very well supported while at the school and consider they have been given a good opportunity to develop their skills in a helpful climate.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving schemes of work to identify opportunities systematically for students
  - to use and apply their mathematics through investigations
  - to use ICT to enhance their mathematical skills
- ensuring students have more opportunities to enhance their learning by working independently and consolidate their learning by persevering at tasks
- ensuring that marking more consistently promotes a learning dialogue between students and teachers and that teachers check that students follow their instructions to complete or extend work.

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