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Mr G Lloyd  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Lloyd

Ofsted survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 7 and 8 October 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 included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of 13 parts of lessons and two tutor sessions.

The overall effectiveness of the subject, mathematics, is outstanding.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Students enter the school with standards well below average and make excellent progress to reach average standards in GCSE examinations. Results have been improving year on year and unvalidated results for 2009 indicate that the proportion of students who gained a grade C or above is higher than the national average. The proportion who gain grades A\* or A has also risen and is broadly average.

- Students follow a variety of additional courses including GCSE statistics and BTEC mathematics. They are similarly successful in these.
- The progress of students in lessons is generally very good because they have a real enthusiasm for learning. They say they enjoy mathematics because it is relevant and fun and they work for their own benefit. Behaviour is excellent and stems from the mutual respect between students and teachers.

### Quality of teaching of mathematics

The quality of teaching of mathematics is outstanding.

- Excellent relationships between staff and students form the basis of some highly interesting and engaging lessons. These often include activities which involve students in working collaboratively or investigating a problem and discussing their answers. Good use is made of the interactive boards to engage all the students.
- Teachers are very good at questioning and using students' responses to target additional teaching or support. Students are used to their responses being challenged and know they are expected to give reasons as well as answers. They are often asked to come up to the board to give their solutions or thoughts. The department ethos of 'trying without fear of getting it wrong' means many students are happy to give their ideas and also to indicate when they do not know.
- Teachers assess students' work well and are very conscientious about checking how students have tried with their homework. However, students do not always follow the expectation that they will mark elements of their own work, to identify errors and either self-correct or ask a teacher for help.

### Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is outstanding.

- Lessons include a rich variety of activities which motivate and engage students. There is strong focus on improving students' understanding and empowering them to take greater ownership of their own learning. A group of Year 7 students was observed using electronic games consoles during form period to try and improve their agility in mental mathematics. These students will have another two-week period of support later in the year. The school has plans to monitor the impact of these sessions.
- Schemes of work include teaching approaches and tasks to enhance students' understanding. There are good references to appropriate teaching activities, often based around investigational or group work. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively within lessons but it is not used systematically by students to enhance graphical or geometrical work.

- All students complete GCSE at the end of Year 10 and then go on to study different elements of mathematics or statistics. The school is used by outside agencies to trial new courses and at the moment some Year 11 students are enjoying the style of work and challenge from a BTEC mathematics course.

### Effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of mathematics is outstanding.

- The department has an accurate evaluation of its strengths based upon a programme of formal and informal observations of lessons. These are used to identify areas for further improvement and ensured standards are continuing to rise and students are engaged and enjoy their mathematics. This also demonstrates the department's very good capacity to carry on improving.
- The strong support given by yourself, and other senior leaders, many of whom are mathematics teachers, has meant the department is very well staffed with highly qualified and skilled teachers.
- Staff within the department have a very strong common belief in what makes good lessons and are all fully committed to reaching the challenging ambition of the school and subject leaders.

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

- The very strong collegiate approach to developing effective teaching has meant that the department is consistently raising the quality of learning within lessons. Lesson plans and activities are regularly discussed and shared so that staff are able to access a variety of ways in which to teach a topic.
- The school uses its specialist mathematics status well to support other schools within the area, for example with additional classes for higher attaining Year 6 students, and also to train new entrants to the profession who may stay and teach within the school.
- As a training provider for other schools, staff are regularly trialling innovative ideas which are then used to enhance the work within the department. As a provider for professional development for others, this also ensures the school is at the forefront of new ideas and a reason why the quality of teaching is so high.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- incorporating more opportunities for students to use ICT to enhance their understanding of geometry and graphical work
- ensuring staff check that students consistently identify areas of concern from their work and rectify errors when they occur.

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