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Mr S Tierney  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Tierney

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 7 and 8 December 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and the observation of 10 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the subject is satisfactory.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is average. GCSE results were steady for a number of years up to 2008, but dipped in 2009. The school's detailed monitoring data indicate that the results for current Year 11 students will be at least in line with the 2008 levels.
- Students enter the school with attainment that is in line with national averages and, given their starting points, they make satisfactory progress during their time in school. In lessons, students show positive attitudes

and make mostly steady gains in their understanding, based on strong relationships and well-structured and varied activities.

- Validated data show that no particular group of students underachieves. Observations during the visit found no evidence of different rates of progress for boys and girls, or for students of different ages or abilities.
- In the sixth form, attainment is broadly average and students make progress that is in line with expectations.

### Quality of teaching of mathematics

The quality of teaching of mathematics is satisfactory.

- Teachers make good use of visual aids to present mathematical ideas, particularly at the start of lessons. In the best lessons, teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan well for progression in understanding and skills. Varied and well-chosen learning activities promote understanding and help to maintain students' positive attitudes to learning.
- Although most teaching has an appropriate focus on developing students' understanding, some promotes the learning of techniques rather than an appreciation of the underlying concepts.
- Teachers place insufficient focus on students' precise use of mathematical terms. Marking does not identify for students where they have recorded subject-specific vocabulary inaccurately.
- Older students generally know their target grades and how well they are progressing in relation to them, but this is often not the case for students in Key Stage 3.
- Students appreciate the good level of support that they receive outside lessons. Many Year 11 students take advantage of the 'Food4thought' sessions after school. Students enjoy being able to access mathematical software and revision materials from home, and this helps them to feel well prepared for examinations.

### Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is good.

- The curriculum caters well for the needs of students in both the main school and the sixth form.
- The school's mathematics and computing specialism has a strong impact on curricular provision; for example, the Saturday 'master classes' attract growing numbers of able students, including several from other local 11 to 16 schools. The strong curriculum and good out-of-class support contribute to students' enjoyment of mathematics and are leading to increasing numbers opting to study the subject at A level.
- Students enjoy the school's regular 'Wonderful Wednesdays', which successfully promote creativity and cross-curricular learning. For example, on a recent day devoted to developing students' understanding of

probability, Year 8 students worked in teams to tackle a series of extended problems that helped them to consolidate and extend their learning.

- Recent revisions to the curriculum include the introduction of the Cognitive Acceleration in Mathematics programme in Year 7. However, the school recognises that some elements of the scheme of work need further updating, together with additional guidance on content and teaching approaches.

### Effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics

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

- Extensive informal contact and more formal staff development are helping teachers to develop their skills in a spirit of mutual support.
- The school's extensive monitoring system is effective in informing teachers about students' prior attainment and identifying those at risk of underachieving. Self-evaluation, including the evaluation of teaching, is accurate and development planning has appropriate areas of focus.
- The department is developing its use of the student voice to inform its future plans.
- Managers' monitoring of the department is satisfactory but does not have sufficient rigour to monitor the broad range of teachers' practice, such as marking, coverage of the curriculum, the use of information and communication technology and teaching approaches used.

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

- A shared mathematics office is helping teachers to exchange ideas, develop good practice and work towards greater consistency in teaching approaches to individual topics. A growing sense of teamwork maintains teachers' positive attitudes to professional development.
- The school's 'Wonderful Wednesdays' encourage teachers to develop more innovative approaches and are providing opportunities for students to learn mathematics in a variety of different contexts.
- The specialism is increasingly helping to foster collaborative work with other local schools and to bring new ideas to the department.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing teaching further through giving more emphasis to students' use of mathematical vocabulary
- monitoring the work of the department more closely to promote greater consistency of teaching approaches, marking and coverage of the scheme of work

- ensuring that Key Stage 3 students know their target and current levels of 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

Paul Chambers  
Her Majesty's Inspector