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Mr P Roach  
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Dear Mr Roach

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 10 and 11 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 observation of 10 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the subject is satisfactory.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Students enter the school having attained slightly below-average results in national Key Stage 2 tests. They make progress that is satisfactory and sometimes better to reach standards at GCSE that are close to average.
- There is some unevenness in the progress of different groups of students in both key stages. In response to the need identified at the school's previous inspection to raise standards and extend the learning and progress of the more able, the school has focused on success at GCSE, particularly at the higher grades. Revision sessions, additional staffing, and strategies, such as mentoring, have proved fruitful. Many average and

more able students have consequently progressed well but the progress of lower attainers and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has not similarly accelerated.

- The quality of learning is satisfactory. Most students concentrate well and respond positively to opportunities for group work and discussion, although they struggle to express their reasoning mathematically. Scrutiny of students' work and discussions with students show that most have few opportunities to develop their skills in using and applying mathematics. This is a current focus for development for the department.
- Behaviour is often good. Students appreciate the support provided by staff and enjoy lessons that are active. Younger students would like to use information and communication technology (ICT) more often. Older students take increasing responsibility for their learning.

### Quality of teaching of mathematics

The quality of teaching of mathematics is satisfactory.

- Most teaching is satisfactory but has some good features, such as in-depth planning that incorporates key questions and links with prior learning.
- The lessons observed reflect the department's developing awareness of the necessary emphasis on the key process skills. Teachers choose enjoyable activities that provide opportunities for group work, problem-solving and investigation, often set in real-life contexts.
- Weaker aspects of the teaching include starter activities that lack focus, concluding plenary sessions that run out of time or do not move learning on, and lack of attention to tailoring activities to meet students' needs. In some lessons, teachers do not anticipate or capitalise upon students' errors or misconceptions to make teaching points. Occasionally, this stems from weaknesses in teachers' mathematical expertise.
- The quality of marking varies. Some provides helpful comments or questions but these are not consistently followed up. Other marking does not distinguish between slips in accuracy and misunderstanding. Students have target grades and are provided with helpful checklists of topics. The use of self- and peer-assessment is in the early stages.

### Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- The scheme of work at Key Stage 4 is based on the modular GCSE specification, the flexibility of which is exploited to optimise students' attainment. The taught curriculum is supplemented by additional revision sessions that students appreciate and support strategies such as mentoring. This provision is inclusive: it is not restricted to students on the C/D grade boundary but is for all who might benefit.
- A new Key Stage 3 scheme of work is being developed in conjunction with the 'Assessing Pupils' Progress' initiative. A range of suitable resources has

been collected for use at both key stages in developing functional skills and using and applying mathematics.

- Currently, there is no guidance for teachers on approaches to promote students' conceptual understanding and explicit development of skills in using and applying mathematics. Opportunities for the use of ICT are not highlighted.

#### Effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics

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

- The newly strengthened mathematics leadership team shows promise: current developments show the right direction of travel. Self-evaluation is broadly accurate and identifies important priorities, although improvement plans would benefit from defined timescales and clearer arrangements for monitoring and evaluation against quantitative targets.
- The department fulfils whole-school expectations with regard to management activities. Line management is supportive but meetings do not routinely check progress on plans or note action points. Joint monitoring by senior staff and the head of department is a good development although follow-through on areas for improvement identified following feedback to staff is not systematic.
- The head of department's analysis of assessment data is a strength. Each teacher has responsibility for evaluating the performance of his/her Year 11 group. However, these reports vary in quality and make insufficient links with what needs to be done differently by individuals or collectively as a department.

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

- A coherent whole-school approach to improving teaching is having a positive impact. Teachers and middle managers are trained on areas, such as planning and assessment, and these are then monitored through learning walks. There are some opportunities for teachers to observe and learn from each other. Judgements on lessons observed jointly during the visit were accurate.
- There is a good level of collaboration within the department but little systematic development of all teachers' subject expertise, including those whose main specialism is not mathematics. For instance, departmental meetings do not routinely feature an aspect of, or activities to improve, teaching and learning in mathematics. The advanced skills teacher is providing support for a less experienced teacher.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving students' rates of progress, particularly those who are lower attaining or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities

- raising the satisfactory teaching to good by:
  - focusing on subject-specific pedagogy
  - following through systematically areas for improvement identified through monitoring
  - setting up collaborative partnerships for teachers who are less experienced in teaching mathematics
- building on current developments in renewing schemes of work, particularly at Key Stage 3, to include guidance for teachers on:
  - approaches, including practical activities and ICT, that promote understanding and secure progression
  - explicit development of students' skills in using and applying mathematics
- sharpening development planning to secure improvement in manageable timescales
- using the outcomes of monitoring to identify and tackle weaknesses and inconsistencies.

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

Jane Jones  
Her Majesty's Inspector