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Mr A Fletcher  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Fletcher

Ofsted 2010-11 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 8 and 9 June 2010 to look at work 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 eight lessons and brief visits to four more.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is satisfactory.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Students enter the school with standards close to the national average, although this varies from year to year. The proportion who gained A\* to C grades at GCSE in 2009 was also close to the national average. Projections for the current cohort are based on accurate assessment data and suggest that, for this year group, attainment will be slightly better. Projections for the current Year 10 cohort are slightly higher again and, if achieved, would represent good progress from this group's lower attainment on entry to the school.
- Data indicate that students' progress has improved significantly in the last three years. It is now satisfactory and improving further.

- In lessons where students know exactly what they are trying to achieve and probing questioning offers challenge, they make good or better progress. Most students are enthusiastic and keen to participate. Where the work is less challenging or objectives are unclear, some students become disengaged, leading to off-task behaviour. In some cases, they are not clear about what they have learned.
- While opportunities for using and applying mathematics are embedded in the Key Stage 3 curriculum, this is less evident at Key Stage 4. However, preparation for the new GCSE specification means that this is planned from September 2010.
- Outcomes for the sixth form have been inadequate in the past. There has been a significant focus on improving this. All students completing A level in 2009 achieved their personal targets, giving them access to the university course of their choice. The department is confidently expecting significantly better AS results for the current Year 12 cohort, with all expected to pass at grades A to E and the large majority to meet or exceed targets. If achieved, this would represent good progress. The one student completing A level this year is expected to achieve her target.
- Students say that they enjoy mathematics. In 2009, only two Year 11 students failed to gain a qualification in the subject.

#### Quality of teaching of mathematics

The quality of teaching of mathematics is satisfactory.

- Aspects of teaching are good or outstanding. Teachers are all subject experts. Relationships between teachers and students are generally very positive.
- The strongest teaching promotes thinking through probing questioning and using and applying mathematics to solve problems in a range of contexts. Students have opportunities to learn independently on their own, in pairs or groups.
- Less effective teaching involves students completing unnecessary tasks which do not promote learning or engagement.
- Termly 'milestone' assessments are used well to monitor progress. All students know their current levels and their targets.
- Assessment in lessons is less consistent. In the best cases, peer and self-assessment are used well so that students are clear about what they have achieved and are able progress independently. In others, however, there is little assessment of progress and plenary sessions do not help students assess their learning and consolidate their understanding.

#### Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum currently offers GCSE mathematics, with GCSE statistics for the most able. Students can re-sit their GCSE in Year 12. Currently, the

large majority of students complete the Adult Literacy and Numeracy (ALAN) award in Year 10.

- Following a review of provision, plans are in place to extend the range of courses on offer from September 2010. All students will have access to functional skills qualifications. The department is moving to modular GCSE for all groups and is investigating BTEC mathematics which it intends to have in place for targeted groups by September 2011 or sooner.
- The new schemes of learning for Key Stage 3 are designed to support all students in making at least two levels of progress during this key stage. They include specific activities which promote the whole-school focus on developing personal, learning and thinking skills.
- Specific activities at Key Stage 3 aim to promote mathematical understanding. This is to be extended into Key Stage 4 in preparation for functional skills courses and the new GCSE specifications. Students at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form have access to a great deal of additional support outside lessons. They have confidence in their teachers and appreciate the help that they receive.
- The department, often through the science specialism, supports development of creativity through activities which promote team work, problem solving and enterprise skills. These take place mainly in Key Stage 3 and are much enjoyed.

#### Effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics

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

- The new head of department, supported by senior leaders and the second in department, has taken incisive action to bring about sustained improvement in provision and in achievement. Self-evaluation is of high quality and is accurate. A focused strategic development plan is driving rapid improvements in progress for sixth-form students together with an upward trend in progress measures for those in Key Stage 4. All of this demonstrates a good capacity for further improvement.
- Monitoring of students' progress is rigorous, supplemented by formal and informal lesson observations and regular scrutiny of students' work. Data are well used to identify students in all year groups who may need intervention to secure appropriate progress.
- Ambition for the students' success is shared by all staff. A wide range of support is available outside lessons from all members of the department.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the quality of teaching by ensuring that sharply focused learning objectives lead to plenaries which allow students and teachers to see how much learning has taken place in a lesson
- making better use of peer and self-assessment to support the development of independent learning skills

- ensuring that all activities in lessons provide suitable challenge and that time is used well.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Helen Pennington  
Additional Inspector