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Mr K Kelly
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Kelly

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 6 and 7 March 2012 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of six lessons in the main school plus short visits to two lessons in the sixth form.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is outstanding.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is outstanding.

- Attainment is very high and has been well above the national average for a number of years. The percentage of students obtaining grade A* to C passes in GCSE mathematics is well above average with a high proportion achieving A and A* grades. A-level pass rates are very high and a large majority of students achieve high grades.
- Students join the school with above average attainment in mathematics and make much better progress than their Key Stage 2 results would suggest. A high proportion of students study mathematics in the sixth form and value-added data show that A-level students make better than expected progress.

- Students' work is of a very high standard. They have a good understanding of mathematical concepts and can see the links between topics. Students enjoy their lessons and are not afraid to explain their methods to the rest of the class or to apply their knowledge in new situations. They work very well in small groups by floating ideas and helping each other tease out misconceptions.

Quality of teaching in mathematics

The quality of teaching in mathematics is outstanding.

- Teachers create a very lively learning environment in which students work hard and are encouraged to think creatively. Almost everyone teaching mathematics is a highly qualified specialist with an obvious enthusiasm for the subject that spreads to students. Teachers give freely of their time out of lessons which is much appreciated by students. Most of the teachers have years of experience and have honed their skills to the highest level.
- Excellent questioning is used to check understanding and to challenge students' thinking. Homework is marked regularly and constructive comments are given but students say that high-quality verbal feedback given in lessons is the major factor in helping them improve their work.
- Lessons are very skilfully planned to build students' understanding and confidence. Any new learning is put in context and builds on earlier work. Teachers judge the pace of lessons exceptionally well and adjust plans appropriately to ensure that understanding is secure.

Quality of the curriculum in mathematics

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is outstanding.

- The curriculum has been developed, refined and updated over a number of years and remains under constant review. It is flexible with a very sharp focus on developing a thorough understanding of concepts. A single scheme of work covers Years 7 to 11. Teachers use their professional judgement to decide how long to spend on each topic but teach the topics in the same order. End-of-year examinations in Key Stage 3 are tailored to each group and are based on the work that has been covered. Procedures are in place to facilitate movement between sets and ensure a smooth handover of groups between teachers.
- The scheme of work is cross-referenced to textbooks, an extensive bank of worksheets and other resources. The scheme also references the previous time each topic was covered and when it will be revisited. Students are taught in bite-size chunks with lots of opportunities to consolidate and build on earlier learning. Students appreciate the variety and chances to consolidate and recap. Teachers show students alternative methods and allow them to choose the one that suits them best.
- Decisions about examination entries are based on the needs of students. Lower sets enter early for GCSE to build confidence and give an opportunity to improve grades. The higher sets sit the examination in the

summer of Year 11, offering every chance to achieve an A* grade. Additional qualifications taken by the most able mathematicians provide an extra challenge and whet their appetite for A-level study. Students are also encouraged to enter competitions such as the Alan Turing code breaking competition run by Manchester University.

- Students have a good range of mathematics options in the sixth form, including further mathematics, and preparation for university entry tests.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics

The effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics is outstanding.

- The head of department provides very strong leadership, has a wealth of experience, and is supported very ably by a talented team of mathematicians. Members of the team have different but complementary skills that are used very well. For example, a mathematician who also teaches physical education works with a group containing a high number of boys in danger of becoming disaffected. The team shares expertise and attends carefully selected training and network events. Work with trainee teachers keeps the team abreast of any new teaching strategies.
- Performance management is very rigorous with regular scrutiny of books, lesson observations and analysis of results by teaching group. Clear feedback is given to teachers and senior leaders take any action necessary to improve provision for students.
- The department has a very good reputation locally and attracts a high calibre field for any vacancies. Because you are keen to maintain quality and plan for succession, you took the opportunity to appoint extra teachers for September 2012. This should more than address the minor staffing issues currently within the department.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and effective action taken on any areas for development. For example, data indicate that strategies to reverse the slight dips in performance in 2011 are proving successful.

Areas for improvement

The inspection did not identify any areas for improvement. The department's accurate self-evaluation and good improvement planning mean that minor areas for improvement are already being tackled effectively.

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

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Jan Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector