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Mr R Williman
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Williman

Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 19 and 20 June 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, with short visits to seven other lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is satisfactory.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Attainment overall is below average and has improved over the last three years. While the proportion of students gaining the highest A* and A grades is below average, the proportion of students attaining the key A* to C threshold matches closely the national average. The school's evidence indicates that the 2012 results are likely to broadly match those in 2011.
- Students make satisfactory progress in lessons and over time. In 2011, the proportion of students making the expected progress between Key Stages 2 and 4 was 59% compared with the national average of 64%. Fewer students make four levels of progress than is typical.
- All groups, including disabled students and those with special educational needs, achieve satisfactorily. However, in 2011, of the students identified

as having special educational needs but without a statement, fewer made the expected progress than similar students nationally.

- In the sixth form, attainment at AS/A level is below average. Students make satisfactory progress relative to their prior attainment at GCSE.
- Students have generally positive attitudes and respond well to the tasks set. They enjoy working in pairs, for example on sorting or matching activities. They apply techniques they have learnt to simplify algebraic expressions and solve equations; they are less confident in setting up their own equations to describe a mathematical situation. A few students respond well only when given very clear direction.

Quality of teaching in mathematics

The quality of teaching in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Teachers use praise effectively to encourage and motivate. They respond well to individual questions, offering good guidance where required. They make good use of teaching assistants so that those with identified needs progress in line with the rest of the class. Students benefit from different teachers using common approaches and materials across similar classes.
- Where teaching is stronger, teachers maintain the pace of learning through giving timed tasks. They ensure that tasks offer appropriate levels of demand. Some teaching provides insufficient challenge for all within the class, for example when presenting students with lengthy lists of routine examples.
- The use of assessment is satisfactory. While teachers' good questioning often encourages students to explain their thinking, sometimes teachers take answers from a few students and move on without further checks, assuming that all students understand.

Quality of the curriculum in mathematics

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is satisfactory.

- The schemes of work for Key Stages 3 and 4 and for the sixth form cover all requirements and meet students' needs. In the current Year 11, all students are entered for GCSE mathematics; a small number also study for an entry-level qualification. The differentiated scheme of work for Key Stage 3 is in development, and currently includes reference to support materials, rich tasks and learning outcomes in some, but not all, areas. The faculty should consider how to achieve a more coherent provision for developing students' skills in using and applying mathematics.
- Approximately 10% of students choose to study advanced mathematics in the sixth form, although considerably fewer continue their studies to complete the second year of the course. Out-of-hours provision to teach further mathematics is made available when demand arises. Timetabled lessons are available to support those sixth form students who wish to improve their GCSE grade.

- The faculty provides additional support to boost students' achievement, including extra lessons, small-group tuition and the use of revision guides. Teachers make regular use of computer software in lessons to consolidate students' learning. Students appreciate the availability of subject-specific software that they can access at home.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics

The effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Although students' achievement remains satisfactory, GCSE results to 2011 form a clear upward trend. Similarly, considerably more students are making the expected progress than was the case two years ago.
- Self-assessment is accurate. Leaders and managers are able to identify strengths and weaknesses in provision and plan for improvement well. They identified where, last year, particular groups performed less well than others and responded with focused actions that have contributed to more students meeting their targets.
- Leaders and managers have maintained satisfactory provision during a time of significant turnover of staff. They allocate additional resources where they perceive a need, such as using an external consultant or ensuring that the Key Stage 4 teaching groups are not too large.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving students' achievement further, particularly for the most able
- strengthening teaching so that:
 - it provides a suitable degree of challenge for all
 - teachers review learning in class more rigorously to ensure that all students understand the key ideas
- developing further the schemes of work in the main school so that they:
 - provide a coherent programme of development for students' skills in using and applying mathematics
 - provide more detailed guidance across a wider range of areas.

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

Paul Chambers
Her Majesty's Inspector