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Mrs G James
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs James

Ofsted 2013–14 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 3 and 4 July 2013 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; a visit to a learning support session; observation of three lessons; and brief visits to a further 10 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is outstanding.

Achievement in mathematics is outstanding.

- Attainment in GCSE, AS and A-level examinations has been very high for several years and a greater proportion of students than average achieve the highest grades. Students make excellent progress.
- Few students are supported by the pupil premium (extra funding provided by the government for students who are entitled to free school meals or looked after by the local authority) but they make much better progress than similar students nationally. Of the students attracting pupil premium funding, the proportion achieving a GCSE, at grades A* to C, matches that of other students. However, the school has already identified that too few are achieving the highest grades and has strengthened pastoral support to remedy this.

- Students' books are an excellent revision resource. Students' written work demonstrates that they make very good progression and consolidated new skills well. Students learn effectively from each other and respond well to unusual challenges.
- Mathematics is a popular subject in school and attracts the largest number of AS students. Progression from AS to A level is good and a high number of students go on to mathematics-related degrees.

Teaching in mathematics is outstanding.

- Teaching is consistently good or better and there is a growing core of outstanding practice. Everyone teaching mathematics is a specialist with their own distinctive style.
- Lessons are planned well so that they build on previous learning and develop understanding. Teachers have very good questioning skills that are used to stretch students' thinking and unpick misconceptions. They monitor students' progress carefully by circulating around the classroom looking at work, asking probing questions and joining group discussions. Work is marked regularly, good feedback is given and students are very clear about the progress they are making and how to get better.
- The department embraces new technology and innovative ideas yet maintains a very good balance between new and traditional methods. Excellent use is made of information technology to enhance learning. Interactive whiteboards are used extensively and effectively; voting pods provide a quick check on understanding; and teachers are making increasing use of tablet computers to augment learning in Key Stage 3. Traditional resources are used very effectively alongside the latest technology to enrich learning.
- Teachers have very detailed information about students' progress and are finding new ways to adapt their teaching in order to cater for the differences within each group. For example, worksheets sent to individual student's computer tablets are tailored to their specific needs. The good practice is not yet sufficiently widespread, however.
- Teaching assistants provide high quality support and are deployed well.

The curriculum in mathematics is outstanding.

- Schemes of work give just the right amount of support and direction to teachers while allowing flexibility. They provide regular opportunities for students to move between sets depending on their progress. There is a strong focus on building understanding rather than teaching recipes. Investigations and projects are used well to encourage students to approach problems in different ways and to think laterally.
- Resources are excellent and are shared well. Teachers work very closely as a team and are continually sharing resources in meetings, in the staffroom or via email.

- The school has very strong links with local primary schools. Key Stage 3 students work with Year 5 and 6 pupils to whet their appetite for more advanced mathematics using quizzes and 'mathemagical' tricks. Year 6 pupils also complete a summer project before joining Year 7. The school has close links with a group of local schools with a similar intake of students. Joint training events and meetings enable Ilkley staff to keep abreast of latest developments and share best practice. The school also has links with Leeds University via the further mathematics support network.

Leadership and management of mathematics are outstanding.

- Leaders have a very clear vision and set ambitious but realistic targets. They know the department's strengths and areas for improvement very well and monitor the performance of staff closely.
- Excellent professional development opportunities include external events; bespoke training and the school's own training programme; joint events with other schools in the teaching alliance; and a generous amount of dedicated time for teachers to work together to plan lessons. There is very effective support for new teachers.
- Data showing students' progress are analysed thoroughly and under-performance is identified early. Strategies to address any issues are implemented quickly.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- making sure all teachers plan activities that closely match the range of learning needs in each class by sharing the existing good practice.

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

As explained previously, 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