

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



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Mr D Williams  
Principal  
Ash Hill Academy  
Ash Hill  
Hatfield  
Doncaster  
South Yorkshire  
DN7 6JH

Dear Mr Williams

### **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 20 and 21 March 2014 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 joint lesson observation and shorter visits to 12 lessons.

### **The overall effectiveness of mathematics requires improvement.**

#### **Achievement in mathematics requires improvement.**

- Students enter the academy with Key Stage 2 results that are significantly below average. For the last two years they have made slower than average progress but achievement is improving. Early entry GCSE results, achieved in Year 10, suggest that Year 11 students will obtain markedly better examination grades than last year. The proportion making expected progress in mathematics is getting much closer to the national average. Sixth formers are making faster than expected progress this year.
- Students' progress is improving as a result of better teaching and much closer monitoring. Any under-performance is identified quickly and early action is taken to address the issues. Many of the gaps between different groups of students, including those in receipt of pupil premium funding,

have narrowed during the year. However, progress made by students with special educational needs is not improving as quickly as that of their peers.

- Most students make good progress in lessons as a result of lively teaching and effective learning but this is not always secured effectively over time. Students take a pride in their books and talk confidently about their learning.

### **Teaching in mathematics requires improvement.**

- Lessons are planned with care and include a well-chosen range of activities and resources that generate and maintain interest. Information technology is used effectively to support and enhance learning. All mathematics lessons are taught by subject specialists who spread an enjoyment of mathematics and work hard to build students' confidence.
- Questioning is used effectively to check understanding and consolidate learning. Teachers circulate to check students' learning, asking probing questions and generating discussion. Working relationships in lessons are good and students are not afraid to volunteer ideas and ask questions. Incorrect answers are used well to develop understanding.
- The new marking policy has led to more consistent marking. However, teachers are missing opportunities to give precise feedback that would help students to improve their work and students are not always doing enough well-targeted questions to build on the good learning that takes place in lessons.

### **The curriculum in mathematics requires improvement.**

- The curriculum is flexible and responsive. Schemes of work give sufficient information to support new and inexperienced teachers. They also allow teachers to tailor their approach to meet students' needs and adjust the pace if necessary. Opportunities to solve problems and carry out investigations are being woven into all schemes of work but this is a developing area of the curriculum.
- Interventions are targeted well and a range of strategies is used to address under-performance. They include the effective deployment of the mathematics coach, intensive revision sessions and drop in support sessions that are open to all students. The academy has already identified the need to revisit and strengthen the curriculum for students with special educational needs especially those attending alternative provision
- Links with other curriculum areas are in the early stages of development.

### **Leadership and management of mathematics are good.**

- Rigorous subject reviews, carried out by the senior leadership team, are playing an important part in raising achievement and improving teaching. Self-evaluation reports are detailed and accurate.

- A very comprehensive tracking system makes it easy for teachers and leaders to monitor students' performance very carefully. The system is used well and underpins the drive for improvement.
- The head of department has risen to the challenge of increased accountability. He knows his department well and has ambitious plans for mathematics. He receives very good support from a highly motivated team that works effectively together.
- Building capacity and succession planning are key strengths of the department. Former A-level mathematics students are attracted back to Ash Hill after university or time spent working and are helped to qualify as teachers through the Schools Direct training programme. Frequent opportunities to share best practice enable teachers to learn from others in the mathematics team and from across the academy. Teachers are also encouraged to extend their expertise in teaching A level, for example, by working alongside experienced sixth-form teachers.

**Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- improving the achievement of students with special educational needs by strengthening mathematics provision for students on alternative provision, in particular
- ensuring that comments on students' work pinpoint misconceptions and help students to overcome any weaknesses.

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

As explained previously, this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

**Jan Bennett**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**