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Mr A Powell  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Powell

### **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, and observation of eight lessons and shorter visits to three other lessons, some jointly with senior staff.

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

#### **Achievement in mathematics is good.**

- Achievement in the sixth form has improved over the last three years and is now outstanding. Mathematics is a popular option at A level and the number studying further mathematics is growing strongly. In 2013, over half of candidates achieved an A\* or A grade in mathematics and all further mathematics candidates achieved grades B to A\*. This represents very good progress from students' starting points.
- The overall progress made by students from Year 7 to 11 has improved significantly over the last three years; in 2013 it was slightly above the national average. Data for current students suggest this improving trend is continuing.
- The high proportion of students making the expected progress disguises significant variations between different groups. The progress of higher attaining students has not been as good as others in the past; the

department is tackling this issue with success. Too few students eligible for the pupil premium make the progress expected given their starting points, but a whole-school approach is beginning to reduce the gap.

- The achievement of students who are disabled or have special educational needs is good because of the intervention team's effective work and links between that team and the learning support department.
- Most students enjoy mathematics and feel well supported by staff. They behave well in lessons and rise happily to the challenges offered. Students like their teachers' enthusiasm for their subject and their high expectations.

### **Teaching in mathematics is good.**

- Teaching is generally good and some is outstanding. All teachers have good working relationships with students and this promotes a positive atmosphere in the department. Teachers' subject knowledge is very good.
- Teaching usually offers a good level of challenge to students. In one lesson, the teacher extended Year 8 students' ability to handle with fluency quite complex algebraic expressions and bring several other skills to bear on the problems posed. Students obviously enjoyed working at such a high level.
- Teaching in the sixth form enables students to achieve very well. Students say that lessons are dynamic and involve very good levels of discussion. They value sharing ideas and working in a supportive environment.
- In some lessons, teaching does not move learning on at a good pace or leaves students without a grasp of how a mathematical process works, which compromises their capacity to be able to recall the technique.
- The quality of marking varies. Some teachers have begun to use marking to pose questions and challenge students' understanding which often results in good written responses and supports secure learning. Other marking simply checks that students have marked their own work accurately, and gives encouragement of a general nature.
- The department has a system to support students on an individual basis if they are underachieving. Three full-time teaching assistants attached to the department provide this intervention. Parents are informed of this extra provision, but not always about its impact.

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

- Teachers enjoy talking about the teaching and learning of mathematics, and they share best practice and good ideas informally. Ideas are not captured, however, and schemes of work do not give indications of what approaches tend to work best with different groups.
- A healthy emphasis on problem solving and the use and application of mathematics is apparent in many lessons, but mechanisms are not in place to ensure that all students have a reliably good experience.
- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) is well developed in some classrooms. In one sixth-form lesson, students' tablet-based work could be viewed on the whiteboard quickly and easily, and be discussed by everybody. Students in Key Stages 3 and 4 do not benefit from

using ICT in classrooms, however. Students can access ICT resources at home to view mathematics videos, do homework and practise questions.

- A few opportunities are presented for students to use their mathematical skills in real contexts: in Key Stage 4 an annual extended-learning-day exercise involves a business simulation, and a personal finance unit of work is delivered. Links with local universities to offer more breadth of experience for able mathematicians in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form are underdeveloped.

### **Leadership and management of mathematics require improvement.**

- The leadership team in mathematics is quite large, with an overall head of department and separate heads of each key stage. You line-manage the department and provide good prompts for its strategic development.
- The development plan outlines some useful and appropriate priorities, but it is not used throughout the year to maintain momentum in key areas, and check that the plan is on target. It gives basic information on how priorities are to be tackled, and what the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms will be. Self-evaluation is infrequent; judgements are sometimes inflated because the analysis of underlying strengths and weaknesses is not rigorous.
- Monitoring of teaching is limited to a small number of formal observations each year, unstructured brief visits by the head of department, and some arrangements for specific training to be provided. Few formal and systematic ways to involve teachers in discussions of the quality of learning exist, despite their readiness to do this.
- The work of the intervention team, although effective, is not well driven by the mathematics department; neither is its impact properly evaluated.

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

- continuing to close the achievement gap for students eligible for the pupil premium
- ensuring that the development of teaching and learning, including the implementation of a marking policy, is better organised
- formalising teachers' current good thinking about teaching and learning so that the whole team can benefit from it, and students' experiences of mathematics become more consistent
- increasing the frequency and impact of monitoring to underpin accurate self-evaluation, and focusing more intensively on priorities for improvement.

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

**Alan Taylor-Bennett**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**