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Mr M Milburn
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Dear Mr Milburn

Ofsted 2014–15 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 11 and 12 November 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 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- Leaders and managers analyse students' performance rigorously and are fully aware of which groups have done well and which groups have done less well. They use the information effectively to identify areas of focus in the department's development plan.
- Although remaining above average, the 2014 GCSE results did not maintain the trend of improvement evident in the years to 2013. The school's data indicate that current students are on track to achieve close to the high standards of 2013.
- Leaders and managers have taken effective steps to minimise the impact of recent absence of staff.

- Leaders are aware that consistent approaches to the teaching of some mathematical topics could aid long-term learning and they have plans to discuss how these might take effect.
- Mathematics enjoys a strong reputation in the school. A substantial proportion of those who go on to A-level studies choose to study mathematics.
- The department provides additional support for Year 6 teachers in the local primary schools to help them get the highest results for their most able pupils. Early indications are that the support is proving effective.

The curriculum in mathematics is good.

- The curriculum is enabling students to achieve well. All students enter GCSE mathematics and almost all gain a qualification at grades A* to G. In Year 11, the most able take an additional Free Standing Mathematics Qualification, which early evidence suggests is preparing them well for A-level studies.
- The schemes of work ensure suitable coverage of all areas of mathematics. They provide lists of possible resources to support teaching in particular topics; leaders have appropriate plans to provide hyperlinks that will make it easier for teachers to review and select from the suggested resources.
- Teachers are aware of which students are at risk of underachieving. They provide additional small-group teaching which helps the targeted students to catch up.
- Members of the department have made adjustments to the Key Stage 3 scheme of work in the light of the new National Curriculum. For example, additional work on financial mathematics is planned for each term. Teachers plan to maintain current assessment arrangements for the immediate future in order to maintain their ability to monitor students' long-term progress.

Teaching in mathematics is good.

- The quality of teaching is consistently good. Teachers ensure that they give an appropriate emphasis to developing conceptual understanding as well as procedural fluency. Teachers use their strong specialist knowledge to ensure that explanations are clear, accurate and expressed in correct mathematical language. They do not always take full advantage of opportunities to assess students' learning in lessons.
- Teachers are aware of national changes that require an additional focus on developing students' mathematical reasoning and problem-solving skills. Evidence from students' books shows that they have begun to develop these skills.
- Students make good progress because teachers identify key mathematical ideas and plan progressively more difficult work. While a small proportion of set work is over-routine, students experience breadth and depth of

challenge because teachers ensure that students encounter questions at the right level and often presented in different ways.

- Teachers are applying the school's marking policy effectively. They identify positive aspects of students' work and how it could be improved. Students are beginning to respond usefully to teachers' comments.

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Students, including the most able, make good progress. From their various starting points, the proportion of students making expected progress compares favourably with national figures. The same is true for the proportion of students exceeding expected progress. Students who enter the school with attainment at National Curriculum Level 4 make outstanding progress.
- Students' attainment is above average. For example, unvalidated results for 2014 show that 80% of students achieved GCSE grades A* to C.
- The achievement of disadvantaged students is uneven. In 2013, their attainment improved to be closer to that of other students at approximately one GCSE grade below. While unvalidated GCSE results for 2014 show a widening of the gap, the school's data indicate that, for current students, the gap is again narrowing.
- Students behave well in lessons and show positive attitudes to their work. Although their problem-solving skills are still developing, students are willing to attempt questions that are multi-step or presented in unfamiliar ways. When they work methodically using a balancing method that they understand, students show good skills in solving algebraic equations.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- establishing a pattern in which disadvantaged students achieve consistently well
- ensuring that teachers take full advantage of opportunities to assess students' learning during lessons.

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

Paul Chambers
Her Majesty's Inspector