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Mr S Flavin
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Dear Mr Flavin

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 16 and 17 May 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 nine lessons, seven of which were conducted jointly with a senior leader.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Attainment has risen rapidly so that standards in GCSE examinations are broadly in line with national figures. This reflects students' good progress over time and is supported by the school's analysis of progress and lesson observations.
- The strong emphasis on improving the proportion of students gaining at least a grade C in GCSE has been very successful. The proportion attaining an A*or A is low by comparison. The results of AS units for the small number of students who are taking an AS mathematics qualification alongside their GCSE indicate that they are likely to achieve excellently.
- The small class and group sizes, combined with well-focused support in response to good assessment, have meant that students with low prior

attainment make very good progress. The progress made by students who are known to eligible for free school meals is well above average and demonstrates how effectively the school has closed the gap between these students and others. Good support is provided for students who are learning English as a new language, including those from Nepal.

- Students have good opportunities to use and apply their mathematics in many lessons. Their attitudes to work in lessons are good, as is behaviour. However, the presentation of students' work in books is sometimes sloppy and shows a lack of pride which is not always challenged by staff.

Quality of teaching in mathematics

The quality of teaching in mathematics is good.

- Teaching is very well planned and all lessons include links to real-life applications; for example, the computer code used in a space invaders game was used to show how algebra is needed. Relevant keywords are emphasised with mathematical language displayed in rooms in other languages to support new entrants to the country.
- In the best lessons, work is well matched to students' abilities with opportunities for students to identify their own level of work. Hence, it is common to see students working at different levels at the same time within these classes. However, in some other lessons, where learning outcomes are identified at three levels, students tend to work at the same pace, covering each of the elements in turn, and rarely progress to the most demanding work. For some, this results in a lack of challenge.
- The quality of marking is variable. It is not consistently frequent or detailed in identifying how students can improve.
- Students often have opportunities to work collaboratively in groups or to complete practical tasks which students enjoy. Staff use the whiteboards well and all students use information and communication technology (ICT) as part of a regular cycle in using the department's computer suite.

Quality of the curriculum in mathematics

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is good.

- The curriculum is highly relevant to students and links well to real-life situations. It includes opportunities to develop mathematical skills as part of the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) topic work. The school works effectively with local industries, for example INTEL on the Bloodhound car. Students in Years 7 and 8 respond well to home-learning projects which are linked to topics which they are covering during the term. Similar opportunities are not available for older students.
- The schemes of work are matched to examination specifications in Key Stage 4. They include opportunities for students to investigate mathematics which are often used well to enable students to make mathematical connections for themselves and hence improve their understanding and learning.

- Students have been entered for GCSE at a variety of differing times and carry on learning mathematics throughout Year 11. Some complete a statistics GCSE alongside improving their GCSE mathematics grade whereas some others successfully study AS units before transferring to the study of mathematics at college or in local sixth forms.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics

The effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics is outstanding.

- You have a very clear ambition for the school's continual improvement. The concentration on improving the key indicators has meant that the school has improved mathematics year on year so that the subject is seen as one of the most successful within the school. This ambition has been shared by the mathematics team which, under excellent leadership of the subject leader, has improved the quality of teaching and raised standards. This demonstrates an excellent capacity to improve.
- The school works well with partner primary schools including well-established links to support gifted and talented mathematicians.
- Performance management is used very effectively to hold staff to account for their students' results. The very supportive and collegiate department works successfully to bring about and embed improvements.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- building upon the improvements to the quality of teaching and learning so that by May 2013 teaching is consistently good or better by:
  - building on the good practice to ensure that work is matched to the individual needs of students
  - ensuring that work in students' books is marked with greater frequency and attention to detail
- raising achievement further by:
  - increasing the proportion of students who gain A* and A grades in GCSE examinations
  - extending opportunities for students to complete home-learning projects across all years.

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.

Yours sincerely

Michael Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector