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Dr I Butterfield
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Dear Dr Butterfield

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 7 and 8 May 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: meetings with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; observation of nine lessons, including two undertaken jointly with senior leaders; shorter visits to five other lessons accompanied by the subject leader and further short visits to two other lessons and three numeracy lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Students usually join the school having attained broadly average results in national tests at primary school. GCSE attainment is similar to the national average. By the end of Key Stage 4, the proportions of students making the progress expected from their different starting points match those of similar students from other secondary schools across the country. About a third of students make better-than-expected progress. Attainment may fall slightly in 2014 because this cohort has below-average prior attainment but progress is likely to be similar to that of 2013.
- The school's data for Years 7 to 10 paint an improving picture of achievement. Students' learning and progress is predominantly good in

lessons and, increasingly, over time. Boys and girls do equally well. Disabled students and those who have special educational needs receive excellent support in their lessons and now achieve as well as others which is an improvement on the 2013 results.

- Just over a third of students are supported by the pupil premium, which provides extra funding for disadvantaged students. These students achieved less well overall than their peers by just over one GCSE grade in 2013. A similar gap is still indicated for 2014, but the school's use of pupil premium funding is showing encouraging signs that the gap for the current Year 10 cohort is closing rapidly.
- Students have positive attitudes towards their learning. Most benefit from good teaching in which they are encouraged to develop their understanding and to think for themselves. Some older students lack confidence in performing mental calculations and sometimes therefore carry out unnecessary written methods instead.

Teaching in mathematics is good.

- Teaching is improving and most is now at least good. Teachers are accomplished in planning activities which make sure that learning occurs at a good pace. They challenge students to think deeper about their answers and carry out regular checks on learning throughout the lesson.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and use this well in encouraging links between topics and the development of other skills. In a Year 10 lesson, students readily considered different approaches to solving problems on percentage increase and decrease. They worked exceptionally well together and shared their methods with the class.
- Students have some opportunities to investigate problems, although inconsistencies occur in the use of this approach across the department. In a Year 7 lesson, lower-ability students tackled enthusiastically a problem they were given to investigate area and perimeter. They tested out their thinking by trying out several examples before arriving at a conclusion. Some students were able to extend this and write a generalisation using algebra.
- The quality of marking varies. Teachers usually mark students' books frequently and diligently, identifying errors and providing detailed corrections so that students know how to make their work better. However, teachers do not always check well enough that students are following this advice.

The curriculum in mathematics is good.

- The curriculum meets the needs of students at both key stages. Literacy development is encouraged through word lists within schemes of work which explain technical language and key terms to be taught. Suggestions for mental and oral activities are included, which teachers use at the start of lessons. Students who have weak numeracy skills are well supported

through extra lessons and a rich variety of activities that are used to develop greater confidence in handling numbers and in measuring.

- The department is well resourced with a range of materials that enhance learning, including information and communication technology. Students use computers or other mobile devices in lessons, for example electronic keypads for quiz responses.
- Students have opportunities to extend their learning outside lessons through homework projects which help to form links with other subjects.
- The department is planning to re-write schemes of work for the new GCSE and also for the new Key Stage 3 curriculum to build on what students already know from primary school, but this work has not yet started.

Leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- The department is committed to improving teaching. Teachers share resources and discuss strategies for teaching topics. A non-specialist teacher, who was supported well with training to convert to a mathematics specialism, now regularly supports others in the department as they develop their skills. Teachers are improving their own practice through observing recordings of their work in the classroom and identifying their own areas for improvement.
- Monitoring of the work of the department is carried out regularly through observing teaching and checking students' books. Observations carried out jointly with senior and subject leaders during the visit were evaluated accurately. Where weaknesses in teaching are evident, swift action is being taken and a support plan is in place. The use of assessment information to monitor progress, rather than attainment, is improving.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving teaching in mathematics so that it is always at least good and more is outstanding
- making sure that advice given to students through marking is acted upon so that they learn faster and make even better progress
- providing all students with rich learning opportunities to deepen their understanding, such as investigations and problems to solve, and monitoring how well these are taught.

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

Denah Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector