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Mr Geoff Tinker  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Tinker

### **Ofsted 2008-09 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics**

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 19 September 2008 to look at work in mathematics.

As outlined in our initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the effectiveness of the school's approaches to improving the quality of teaching and learning 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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the subject, mathematics, was judged to be outstanding

### **Achievement and standards**

Achievement in mathematics is outstanding and standards are above average.

- Students enter the school with standards which are average.
- Results at the end of Key Stage 3 have improved over the last few years and unvalidated results, corroborated by teacher assessments, suggest results for 2008 are above average.
- Key stage 4 results show that GCSE passes at the higher A\*-C grades continue to be well above average and students make excellent progress from the time they start school. In 2008, all students passed GCSE and over two thirds gained a higher grade.

- The school has high expectations of students. Targets are used effectively to motivate and guide students who say that they feel very well supported.
- Attitudes to mathematics are very good and, as a result, behaviour observed in lessons is excellent. As two students said, 'mathematics is good because lessons are enjoyable, especially over the last year and a bit.' They went on to explain that activities motivate them and ensure they understand the work better.

### **Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics**

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is good.

- Lessons are well planned and challenging for students. Very good use is made of the interactive whiteboards by staff, especially at the start of lessons. Teachers share resources and teaching ideas.
- Excellent relationships between teachers and students ensure very good behaviour and engagement by students, although sometimes the pace of lessons could be sharper.
- The strong emphasis on improving the quality of teaching has ensured lessons are more engaging and varied. Activities often include elements of investigations or matching the work to real-life applications. Sometimes, the strong teaching does not give sufficient consideration to students' independence when learning. Students are not always given enough time to persevere with their work before being given help so that they do not deepen their learning and become effective independent learners.
- Assessment is used well in lessons. When students explain their answers, some others notice their own errors and then correct their own work. Teachers circulate the room to identify any students who are not confident and use questions well to identify who may need further support. Marking identifies areas of concern and students say they receive very good support when they have had problems with their work.
- Teaching assistants work well with individual or groups of students and have previously agreed with the class teacher on their role.

### **Quality of the mathematics curriculum**

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is good.

- High-quality planning is shared with staff so that there is good access to a wide variety of teaching activities. Many include suitable investigations, across both key stages, and these are also used very well to stimulate students when studying some less 'exciting' elements of mathematics. Others are effectively linked to 'real-life' mathematics, including financial capability.
- The school has implemented a comprehensive system to encourage creativity, personal learning and thinking skills for all students, not just Year 7. A 'Challenge day' is timetabled every fortnight to allow students to follow a task incorporating opportunities to develop the above skills in a cross-curricular way. Students enthusiastically appreciated the first of these days on team building. There have also been successful cross-curricular days linked to specialist areas, for example studying the 'Enigma' code as part of history.

- Very good support is given to students with learning difficulties. Intervention is targeted on the basis of need and is sometimes used to pre-teach topics so that students are then more able to work with their peers. A highly respected mentoring system supports students at lunchtime with mentors often having been mentees in earlier years.
- The school has well formulated plans for some students in Year 10 to complete their GCSE in that year and then study additional mathematics and GCSE statistics.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well in classrooms by teachers but there are few opportunities for students to use ICT to enhance their understanding through the use of computers.

### **Leadership and management of mathematics**

The leadership and management of mathematics are outstanding

- The impact of the subject leader over the last year and a half is very tangible. Staff and students commented very favourably on how the department has a clear focus on improving understanding and teaching and how lessons had become far more interesting and relevant.
- You have ensured that departments are held to account through departmental reviews. These involve effective and accurate lesson observations, including those by peers, and views from students. Senior leaders give excellent support and challenge to ensure departments regularly monitor students' work and the quality of teaching.

### **Subject issue: the effectiveness of the school's approaches to improving the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics**

- The school has been extremely successful in improving the quality of teaching within mathematics lessons so that they are now more engaging and relevant.
- Teaching ideas and strategies are regularly shared informally as well as being the main focus during departmental meetings.
- The subject leader has empowered staff to make good use of their interactive whiteboards. While the school utilises support from a variety of different sources, leaders feel they have had limited support from the National Strategies.

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

- involving students more in their learning and allowing greater time before intervening with support
- ensuring greater opportunities and access to ICT to support students' learning in mathematics lessons.

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

As explained in our previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

**Michael Smith**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**