

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr P Phillips
Headteacher
St Edmund Arrowsmith Catholic High School
Rookery Avenue
Ashton-in-Makerfield
Wigan
Lancashire
WN4 9PF

Dear Mr Phillips

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 4 and 5 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: meetings with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; observation of seven lessons, all undertaken jointly with staff from the school, and shorter visits to three further lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is outstanding.

Achievement in mathematics is outstanding.

- Students join the school with levels of attainment in mathematics that are higher usually than those seen nationally. In 2013, the proportions of students meeting or exceeding the government's benchmark measure of three or more levels of progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 was well above that of most other secondary schools across the country. Nearly 90% of students secured at least a grade C in GCSE mathematics, and a little under 40% achieved an A or A*.
- All groups of students make at least good progress in mathematics, including disabled students and those with special educational needs. Many more-able students make exceptional progress because of the

challenging teaching they receive. Although the levels of attainment reached by students eligible for additional support through pupil premium funding was, on average, around one GCSE grade lower than that of other students in 2013, the progress they made from their starting points on joining the school at least matched that of their peers in the school.

- Students respond very well to the high levels of challenge and expectations of staff. They benefit from working together to solve problems, and are always willing to 'have a go' and learn from their mistakes.

Teaching in mathematics is outstanding.

- Almost all mathematics teaching is of consistently high quality. Teachers have very high expectations of the students they teach. Students work exceptionally well with their teachers. They enjoy mathematics and show outstanding attitudes to learning. All these features contribute very strongly to students' outstanding progress overall.
- Scrutiny of students' work shows that their learning in mathematics over time is very secure. The teaching they receive helps them to master the skills they need to succeed and to be well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training. For example, during the inspection, groups of more-able students thoroughly enjoyed investigating the transformation of trigonometric functions using information and communication technology to support their learning. They made very good progress because they were able to try out their own ideas and reason for themselves.
- Much of the teaching helps students to develop a good conceptual understanding of the mathematics they learn, and many are confident and skilful problem solvers. This is because, in many lessons, teachers ensure a strong emphasis on these aspects. Not all teaching is like this, however. Further refinements are needed to curriculum guidance to ensure that the very best practice is shared effectively across all the teachers in the mathematics department.
- Teachers know their classes very well, particularly in Key Stage 4. As a result, most teaching anticipates and builds skilfully upon students' misconceptions and tackles any barriers to learning. Assessment information is used highly effectively to tailor teaching to the specific needs of different groups of students. Prompt and precise actions are taken to support any students who fall behind.

The curriculum in mathematics is good.

- The curriculum provides good opportunities for students to achieve well by the end of Key Stage 4. Additional support and targeted adaptations to the curriculum enable most groups of students to reach their potential in the subject. Early entry to the GCSE examination is used for a small number of higher-attaining students who benefit from this strategy. An innovative approach to curriculum design is characterised by a range of valuable routes to accreditation.

- A dedicated space on the school's network is used by staff to share a wealth of lesson planning and resources in mathematics. However, while good practice and agreed approaches are discussed informally, they are not captured effectively in existing schemes of work. As a result, best practice in developing students' understanding and problem-solving skills is not always readily available to all teachers. This leads to some inconsistency in teaching.
- The mathematics team is beginning to make effective links with other subject areas. This is helping to ensure greater consistency in students' application of mathematical skills across the curriculum.

Leadership and management of mathematics are outstanding.

- Leaders and managers, staff and governors, are similarly uncompromising in their pursuit of excellence. Aspects of work in mathematics are rightly regarded as examples of the very best practice in the school. The culture of high achievement and enjoyment of mathematics is well established. No stone is left unturned in striving for the very best. As a result, high performance has been sustained and built upon.
- The vision for good and outstanding learning in mathematics is clear. Staff benefit from a wide range of professional development opportunities. Senior staff and subject leaders undertake regular monitoring of teaching and understand the actions required to bring about further improvement. The evaluations of teaching following lessons observed jointly with me were accurate and insightful. However, records of monitoring do not always pinpoint precisely enough how teaching can be improved, or ensure a rigorous evaluation of the quality of teaching over time.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the amount of outstanding teaching by strengthening the quality of guidance for teachers so that all teaching benefits from the very best practice in the department
- ensuring that records of leaders' checks on teaching draw on a good range of evidence of learning over time and identify more precisely improvement points for staff.

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

Lee Northern
Her Majesty's Inspector