

Lancaster University School of Mathematics

Monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector:	Alison Cameron Brandwood, His Majesty's Inspector
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Address:	67–69 London Road Preston Lancashire PR1 4BA

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Ofsted undertakes to carry out monitoring visits to all newly directly funded providers of education programmes for young people within the further education and skills sector. This monitoring visit was undertaken as part of those arrangements and as outlined in the 'Further education and skills inspection handbook', especially the sections entitled 'Monitoring visits' and 'Monitoring visits to providers that are newly directly publicly funded'. The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below.

Lancaster University School of Mathematics (LUSoM) is in Preston, Lancashire. LUSoM is part of The Rigby Education Trust, which was set up by senior leaders from Cardinal Newman College and Lancaster University. The first cohort of students started in September 2022. Alongside A levels in mathematics and further mathematics, all students study a third A level in physics, chemistry or computer science at LUSoM. Students can study a fourth A level at either LUSoM or with their subcontractor, Cardinal Newman College.

At the time of the visit, there were 89 students enrolled at LUSoM. Thirty-two students were in Year 13 and 57 were in Year 12. Most students studied a fourth A level, with the large majority being taught at LUSoM. A small minority of students were taught at the subcontractor, where most students studied an A level in biology or economics.

Themes

How much progress have leaders and managers made in designing and delivering relevant education programmes that have a clearly defined purpose? Significant progress

Leaders, managers and trustees have a clear vision to provide high-quality education so that students can move on to successful careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Students flourish in a distinctive mathematics environment where they can be themselves. Almost all students in Year 13 have applied for and received offers at Russell Group universities for STEM-related degrees. Leaders engage in outreach work to local schools to attract a broad range of students. They are focused on ensuring that students from disadvantaged backgrounds and female students attend LUSoM. Just under one third of current students are female.

Leaders have developed an extremely ambitious curriculum. In A-level further mathematics, students select two or three optional units related to their future career plans. For example, students aiming to study engineering choose the

mechanics major option, whereas those wishing to progress into computer science select the modelling with algorithms option.

Leaders have effective quality assurance systems and processes in place that focus on continuously improving the quality of education. They use a range of evidence to identify what they do well and what they need to improve. Leaders use the information that they gather to identify specific areas for improvement. They swiftly put in place support and training for teachers who improve their practice as a result. Leaders hold their subcontractors to account for the quality of education. They challenge leaders at the subcontractor to improve teaching and learning in subjects where students are not making enough progress.

Trustees provide high levels of scrutiny to leaders about the quality of education. Leaders provide trustees with comprehensive reports that include the progress that students are making at LUSoM and with the subcontractor. Trustees question leaders about topics such as the destinations of students who have left LUSoM early. Leaders track the destinations of these students, most of whom went on to study at the subcontractor.

How much progress have leaders and managers made to ensure that learners benefit from high-quality education programmes for young people that prepare them well for their intended job role, career aim and/or personal goals? Significant progress

Leaders and managers identify students' existing skills, knowledge and experiences very well at the start of their programme. They use this information to plan and sequence highly effective and challenging curriculums. Teachers frequently embed degree-level work into their teaching to prepare students for their next steps. For example, in A-level chemistry, students use matrices to calculate molecule bonding and stability. Students develop substantial new knowledge and skills.

Teachers are experts in the subjects that they teach and are qualified teachers. They visit other mathematics schools to share good practice. Teachers take part in a wide range of professional development and training activities in their specialist areas and in teaching and learning. They use the knowledge and skills that they gain to support students to make significant progress in their studies. For example, following extended note-taking training, teachers support students to become proficient in their own note-taking skills.

Leaders ensure that students develop a wealth of skills and behaviours beyond the A-level subjects that they study. Students take part in a range of development and enrichment activities. These include university test preparation sessions, guest lectures and weekly 'downtime' clubs, such as cookery, art and chess. Students take part in the LUSoM Award, in which they collaborate with their peers and a mentor from Lancaster University. They research a subject that is related to their chosen career. They present their findings on topics such as medical statistics in the form of

an academic poster to friends, family and academics at the university. Students develop their confidence, presentation, teamworking and research skills.

How much progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that effective safeguarding arrangements are in place? Reasonable progress

Leaders, managers and trustees place a high priority on ensuring that students are kept safe. Leaders have appropriate checks in place to ensure that staff are suitable to work at LUSoM and at the subcontractor. The designated safeguarding lead is experienced and well qualified for the role. They follow up concerns about safeguarding promptly.

Students benefit from talks and debates, such as toxic masculinity and consent. They are respectful of each other's opinions and views. Students understand how to stay safe online, including how to spot dangerous messages. They feel safe at LUSoM and at the subcontractor.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
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