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Mrs J Wilson  
Headteacher  
Castlefort Junior Mixed and Infant School  
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Dear Mrs Wilson

### **Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit with Su Crawford HMI on 27 September 2010 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 pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; observation of one lesson, and brief visits to seven other lessons and three intervention sessions.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is satisfactory.

#### **Achievement in mathematics**

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory.

- The mathematical skills of the youngest pupils are, overall, a little below those expected of their age group. By the end of Key Stage 1, attainment is broadly average, with the provisional results of teachers' assessments for 2010 showing an improvement over the previous year. Likewise at Key Stage 2, attainment is average. Although the proportion of pupils reaching Level 5 rose in 2010, there remains more to do to ensure that the more able pupils are challenged to reach their potential. Overall, these pupils made satisfactory progress during their time in the school.

- Current rates of progress in lessons are satisfactory and sometimes good. Pupils are attentive learners and discuss their mathematical thinking well with their 'talk partners'. Although the school has improved results in mental arithmetic tests through practice, pupils' recall of and fluency with number remain weak and can hamper their ability to solve problems; this is an area that the school is working hard to improve. Pupils' investigative skills are less well developed than other elements of the mathematics curriculum.
- A range of targeted support helps pupils to overcome difficulties, catch up where their progress has slipped, and boosts the performance of those who are working just below nationally expected levels.

### **Quality of teaching of mathematics**

The quality of teaching of mathematics is satisfactory.

- Teaching is mostly satisfactory but with some strong practice. Positive features were seen in several lessons, including those taught by less experienced teachers. Strengths included good use of pair work which encouraged pupils to collaborate and to discuss their reasoning. Some teachers and teaching assistants capitalised particularly well on pupils' responses to probe their understanding or challenge their thinking further, for example asking Year 2 pupils, 'What does  $2+7=7+2$  tell us about addition?' Errors were used constructively, for example, when a teacher turned a pupil's comment about reflection into a discussion point before linking it to the lesson's work on parallel lines.
- Good attention is generally given to mathematical presentation and vocabulary. Pupils respond well to teachers' expectations of their written work and oral contributions.
- There is scope to improve aspects of the teaching. Some teachers are not precise about what pupils will learn and how activities will enable all to be suitably challenged, especially the most able and when the youngest pupils are engaged in free-choice activities. Selected approaches and resources do not develop pupils' conceptual understanding consistently well. Repetitive exercises are more prevalent in some classes than others.
- Pupils' work in mathematics is marked every day. Some marking helpfully pinpoints errors and provides next steps. Pupils are increasingly involved in self-assessment, writing comments on what they have done well and what they would like to improve or do next.

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

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- Planning is based on the Primary National Strategy framework, supplemented by a range of published resources, which ensures suitable coverage of the mathematical content of the curriculum. Additional lessons on problem solving have been introduced this year. However, progression in 'using and applying mathematics' is not being developed systematically.

Teachers need guidance on this and particularly on activities to develop pupils' investigative skills. The school has recently reviewed its calculation policy, but more work is required to ensure that all pupils benefit from teaching approaches that promote conceptual understanding, including the use of information and communication technology and practical resources.

- All pupils' progress is carefully monitored, and teaching assistants, all of whom are trained appropriately, provide support for those pupils working just below the levels expected for their age. A recently introduced initiative is daily sessions for pupils who experienced difficulty in the previous lesson so that the difficulty is overcome before the next lesson.
- Links are made between mathematics and other subjects through themes such as 'the Egyptians' but pupils do not always recognise the applications. They were keen to see connections, for example, between mathematics and art, and one suggested 'doing sums with Egyptian numbers'.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics**

The leadership and management of mathematics are satisfactory.

- Less than two years into your headship, signs of raised achievement in mathematics are emerging. You have secured the foundations for further improvement by taking a robust, thorough approach to support for staff, coupled with challenge for any underperformance. Accurate self-evaluation feeds into improvement planning and, while success criteria could be more sharply defined, arrangements for monitoring and training are coherently thought through. These well-organised systems and structures mean that any residual underachievement can be pinpointed and its causes tackled. All of this is further strengthened by the commitment of staff to your vision for the way forward. Capacity to improve is good.
- Good use has been made of a range of opportunities for professional development. These include various courses and bespoke support from the local authority's consultants for numeracy and early years. Links with the school's partner secondary school, which has a mathematics and computing specialism, have been productive for staff and pupils alike.
- Leadership of the subject is in a transitional phase with a new coordinator due to take up post later this term. The subject is currently led by the acting deputy headteacher, who has worked alongside you on introducing some important developments such as the increased focus on problem solving and practice of mental arithmetic skills.

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

- improving the quality of teaching by:
  - sharpening lesson planning to ensure that the intended learning is clearly defined and activities are purposeful
  - ensuring that higher attaining pupils are suitably challenged in lessons

- honing the effectiveness of questioning by teachers and other adults
  - capitalising on the good practice that exists within the school.
- developing guidance for staff on approaches and activities that promote conceptual understanding and on securing progression in 'using and applying mathematics'.

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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Jane Jones**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**