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Mrs J Troth
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Troth

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 on 30 November 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; a scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Attainment in mathematics is average when compared to national averages. Around 80% of all pupils reach expected standards with over a third reaching the higher level. However, there are specific strengths within this picture. Standards of work in basic number skills, particularly when using fractions and decimals, shape recognition and the ability to use both standard and non standard methods of calculation are high. Despite these strengths, pupils are less secure in the use of precise mathematical vocabulary and solving word problems.
- The progress made by pupils over the last three years in mathematics is significantly better than most schools, although, this declined slightly in 2010. The school has taken steps to redress this and progress made by the current Year 6 is stronger.

- Pupils enjoy their mathematics and many consider it a favourite subject. They also say that they get good help and support when they need it, especially through 'booster' groups and their individual mini targets. Particular pleasures include fractions, which they say can be 'fun' and the opportunity to try out new ways of finding solutions to problems. They also suggest that there is not enough problem solving and puzzles work for their preference.

Quality of teaching of mathematics

The quality of teaching of mathematics is good.

- Outstanding teaching in some classes generates enthusiasm, high challenge and a rapid pace of learning. Teachers question pupils well and encourage regular dialogue and discussion. In one example, the teacher's almost continuous open questioning, such as 'how do you know that?' or 'why was that?', deepened pupils' thinking and created an exciting buzz. The teaching of number skills is especially strong.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge in mathematics. However, the quality varies and in some classes tasks are not always well matched to pupils' needs with some being too complex and others being too easy. This is because not all teachers assess pupils' understanding in mathematics accurately and occasionally pupils' misconceptions aren't corrected.
- Teaching assistants contribute to the planning of mathematics with some teachers identifying what their role will be in impressive detail.
- Marking is up to date but generally focused on answers rather than next steps. Occasionally, casual inaccuracies remain uncorrected, especially those made by lower ability pupils. A good example of the potential offered by imaginative marking in some classes is the use of photographs to record pupils' understanding and sorting of shapes.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum contains an appropriately wide range of mathematical opportunity but is heavily biased towards number, test practice and rehearsal of methods. This emphasis restricts problem solving and investigative work which in turn caps understanding in these aspects. The use of interactive software is effective and the subject is well resourced. Pupils are supported well when they need it.
- The school currently groups pupils according to gender in mathematics in some year groups. This was a thoughtful approach to a gap in the performance between girls and boys which has led to an improvement in the achievement of some girls. However, the school is unconvinced about the impact on all pupils and, following a recent review, have amended the settings for year 4.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of mathematics is good.

- The leadership of mathematics is a shared responsibility with you as the headteacher retaining closeness to the monitoring of performance data while the subject leader manages classroom practice. Although an effective team, this has allowed some variation in provision to remain.
- Particular strengths in leadership and management include very effective monitoring of pupil progress and a good use of individual targets for pupils. Self-evaluation is accurate. The subject leader is a strong role-model for the teaching of mathematics but she has too little time to monitor the quality of teaching in other classrooms formally.
- The school is responsive to changing patterns of performance. A thoughtful professional development programme and the involvement of governors help to maintain ambition. There is a good capacity to improve.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- reviewing the curriculum by enhancing the opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills in open-ended and problem-solving activities and develop their mathematical reasoning and vocabulary
- improving the assessment of pupils' understanding of mathematics during lessons
- increasing the monitoring of classroom practice to iron out variations in teachers' and pupils' performance.

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

Ceri Morgan
Her Majesty's Inspector