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Mrs A Buck
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Dear Mrs Buck

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 12 January 2011 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; and observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Attainment and pupils' progress in mathematics have fluctuated over the last three years, varying from well above to in line with national averages. All groups of pupils made significantly above average progress in 2009 and again in 2010 except those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Attainment is more often in line with national averages than above and experiences occasional dips, for example, for Key Stage 1 in 2010, but also peaks for some groups, for instance, more able Year 6 pupils in 2010.
- While some variation between cohorts is natural, the school responds to the fluctuation by making thoughtful changes to the curriculum and the way pupils are grouped. As a consequence of these actions and current

good teaching, the progress being made by pupils in the lessons observed and evident in their workbooks was securely good.

- Pupils show considerable enthusiasm for the subject and engage well with the activities. They support each other well and enjoy lessons which have high levels of challenge and expectation. They are especially keen to debate and discuss their various problem-solving strategies.

Quality of teaching of mathematics

The quality of teaching of mathematics is good.

- In every lesson observed, teaching was good. Particular strengths include thoughtful approaches to the grouping of pupils. In one class for example, pupils chose to work in the group they felt was most appropriate for their ability for that topic. They all did so with genuine insight and integrity and completed the work set for the group. This approach to accurate self-assessment is routine throughout the school. However, teachers do not yet convert their assessments into targets for pupils' learning – a feature pupils themselves say they would like and the school identified as an area for development this year.
- Delightful relationships between pupils and adults are commonplace. Good use of lesson timings ensures that the pace of learning is maintained. Teachers generally have secure mathematical subject knowledge although, in some cases, it became fragile at the higher levels. This limited the opportunities for some very able pupils to explore more challenging open activities and allowed occasional misconceptions to remain.
- Extensive additional support is provided for pupils from additional activities, such as booster groups and occasional mathematics 'challenge weeks'. Teaching assistants help pupils well, especially in developing their mathematical vocabulary. Technology is used well to develop learning but more often by teachers rather than pupils. Marking is up to date but not always developmental and often relies on quick congratulatory remarks.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is good.

- The curriculum has particular assets. One of these is the way pupils are frequently expected and encouraged in most lessons to discuss with their 'talk partners' their mathematical thinking, especially during investigative sessions. As a result, pupils are able to articulate the strategies they use to solve problems. All pupils get regular opportunities to apply their strong number skills in open and challenging tasks. Additional activities, such as the 'maths week', and links with other subjects are designed explicitly to enhance interest and enthusiasm. Pupils are taught standard and non-standard methods of calculation well and have many chances to develop mental images and apply their skills in various contexts to increase their understanding.

- Practical activities, although useful, tend to be offered at the end of a series of formal sessions rather than as starter prompts. Similarly, homework tends to be revision or practice rather than more creative tasks.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics

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

- Leadership of mathematics is ambitious and organised. A thoughtful approach to professional development is linked to pupils' performance. However, the termly pattern of lesson observations and book scrutiny is not always tightly linked to achievement in mathematics. This contributes to the annual variation in pupils' performance. However, the subject leader is a powerful ambassador for the subject, fostering a positive approach to mathematics.
- The capacity to improve is good. Leaders have an accurate picture of relative strengths and priorities for development, informed by the recent review of overall provision for mathematics. While this has led to immediate improvements in resources, the school has yet to produce a detailed action plan.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- resolving variations in performance by establishing more frequent monitoring which includes an audit of teachers' subject knowledge at the higher levels
- improving the quality of marking and using this to re-establish a target-setting process to ensure pupils know what is expected of them
- strengthening the curriculum by ensuring that problem-solving opportunities are used to promote deeper learning rather than simply as revision or 'stand alone' activities, especially for the more able.

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