

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



19 April 2011

Mr P De Wolf
Headteacher
St John's Church of England (VA) Combined School
Main Road
Lacey Green
Princes Risborough
HP27 0PL

Dear Mr De Wolf

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 31 March 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 three lessons and a learning walk which focused on the higher attaining pupils.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is outstanding.

- Children start school in Reception with good levels of knowledge and understanding. They make consistently good progress in each key stage and reach high levels of attainment in Year 6. Two thirds of the pupils currently in Year 6 are on course to achieve Level 5 in mathematics.
- Pupils think for themselves, persevere and learn from their mistakes. They thoroughly enjoy learning and speak with great enthusiasm about the exciting variety of activities they are given.
- In lessons, older pupils demonstrate a very good understanding of mathematical vocabulary and explain their reasoning with clarity and confidence. For example, Year 6 pupils responded assuredly when

challenged to explain their thinking and choice of strategies and to identify potential pitfalls when adding 45mm, 17cm and 0.2m.

- Pupils are not afraid to get things wrong but accept mistakes as part of the learning process.
- Occasionally, progress in lessons slows when tasks are overcomplicated and pupils do not have a sufficiently clear understanding of the expected outcomes.

Quality of teaching in mathematics

The quality of teaching in mathematics is good.

- Teachers generate enthusiasm and enjoyment in lessons by making learning fun. They have high expectations of pupils so that learning generally moves along at a brisk pace. Lessons provide good challenge for the more able pupils.
- Teachers' skilful questioning focuses closely on developing understanding and identifying misconceptions. In a Year 5 lesson, this led pupils to make sensible predictions of the chances of their spinner landing on a particular number.
- Pupils are given good opportunities for paired work, discussion and investigation as well as working independently.
- Occasionally, when teaching is satisfactory, tasks are not matched well to the needs of different groups so that some pupils do not fully understand the purpose of their task.
- The quality of marking, the setting of individual curricular targets, and opportunities for pupils to assess their own and others' work vary. There is much good practice but this is inconsistent between classes and is a current focus in the subject action plan.

Quality of the curriculum in mathematics

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is good.

- The curriculum is well planned to provide continuity and progression in learning for each year group, for example through the clear guidance in the 'four operations' booklets that are shared with parents.
- A current focus is increasing opportunities for pupils to use and apply their knowledge and skills in everyday contexts and to learn mathematics through other subjects.
- One good example of a more creative cross-curricular approach was the 'Kenyan market' in a Year 2 lesson, when pupils manned stalls and 'sold' an exciting variety of goods to their Year 3 customers, calculating the cost of purchases and how much change to give them.
- Interventions and support for individual pupils and small groups are planned carefully to meet specific needs and address gaps in

understanding. Skilled teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to this work.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics

Leadership and management in mathematics are good.

- Subject leadership is founded effectively on good subject knowledge and high aspirations for pupils' achievement. Leaders are fully aware of recent developments in mathematics teaching and provide good support and guidance for colleagues through in-house training.
- Rigorous self-evaluation has enabled leaders to identify and address appropriate priorities for improvement following a period when English has been the main focus for improvement in the school.
- The systems for assessing and monitoring pupils' progress are being refined and leaders' analysis of assessments is used well to inform decisions about intervention strategies and to identify weaker areas of mathematics across the school.
- Good initiatives, which engage parents and enable them to support their children's learning, include informative booklets, the school's website and popular mathematics workshops.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- sharing the good practice that already exists in marking, self-assessment and the use of curricular targets to ensure greater consistency and a demonstrable impact on the quality and pace of learning
- increasing further and embedding opportunities for pupils to use and apply mathematical knowledge and skills in a variety of practical contexts and through links with other subjects.

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

Carole Skinner
Additional Inspector