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24 November 2011

Mr M Garratt
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Garratt

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 16 November 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 observations of parts of lessons from Reception to Year 5.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is satisfactory.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Variations in the quality of learning between classes and ability sets have resulted in uneven progress in across the school, despite consistently above average attainment in Year 6. Recent actions taken by the leadership team to iron out these inconsistencies are having a good impact to show strong signs of improvement.
- More able pupils generally achieve well but middle- and lower-attaining pupils in upper Key Stage 2 often have gaps in their understanding of key concepts due to weaker teaching in previous years. Pupils demonstrate reasonable levels of accuracy when performing written and mental calculations but many are over-reliant on copying teachers' methods without fully understanding why they arrive at a correct answer. This limits their ability to apply previous learning in unfamiliar situations.

- Pupils are keen to learn and most say that they enjoy mathematics lessons. One Year 6 pupil commented, 'If you make maths fun, it's easier' and others agreed that teachers make lessons interesting and challenging.
- Many pupils, including the most able, do not use mathematical language precisely enough when explaining the calculations and strategies they have used.

Quality of teaching in mathematics

The quality of teaching in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Raised expectations and a comprehensive programme of staff training are having a beneficial impact on teaching. Much teaching is of good quality but inconsistencies remain, particularly in how well teachers enhance pupils' depth of understanding. Teachers' levels of confidence in their own subject knowledge are variable.
- Teachers are making increasingly effective use of visual representations and practical apparatus to support learning, especially for pupils who take longer to grasp new concepts. Samples of work and discussions with pupils in Year 6 show that some have moved on too quickly from one concept to the next before understanding is secure.
- The use of assessment to support learning is currently a focus for development. Pupils are given opportunities to assess their own understanding and teachers use this information with varying degrees of effectiveness to adapt their planning. Marking is variable in quality and pupils are not always given the opportunity to follow up teachers' comments.

Quality of the curriculum in mathematics

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is satisfactory.

- The focus on ensuring progression in knowledge and skills is clear across the school. Team planning in year groups aids greater consistency and the sharing of expertise.
- All pupils are given opportunities to carry out mathematical investigations and solve problems, although these are often planned as separate lessons rather than being routinely integrated into day-to-day learning.
- Carefully planned and targeted support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is helping them to overcome difficulties, in lessons and when given tuition individually or in a small group. An early morning mathematics club provides additional support for pupils who are struggling with particular concepts.
- While some links with other subjects, such as art, science and design and technology, are evident, opportunities for incorporating mathematics into class topics and themes are not fully exploited. In part this is because it is taught as a discrete subject in ability sets.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics

The effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics is good.

- You have successfully established a strong mathematics curriculum team with a shared vision for improvement, which is being driven at a rapid pace, fuelled by the school's success in accelerating progress in literacy last year.
- As a result of a range of rigorous monitoring activities, including the innovative 'Day in the Life' in-depth evaluation of a year group, leaders have a good understanding of the subject's strengths and weaknesses.
- Exceptionally thorough analysis of progress data for a wide range of groups has resulted in challenging targets for improvement which inform the programme of staff training.
- Although lesson observations evaluate learning, they do not always highlight how well pupils of different abilities within a set or class are developing conceptual understanding.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that teaching is consistently effective in securing pupils' understanding of key concepts before moving them on to the next stage of learning
- enhancing teachers' subject knowledge and confidence across all aspects of mathematics
- integrating opportunities for pupils to use, apply and extend their mathematical knowledge, understanding and skills in day-to-day mathematics lessons and through 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