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Mrs N Wood
Acting Headteacher
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School
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Dear Mrs Wood

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 15 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; observation of two lessons and a learning walk around the school.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Children's mathematical skills when they start in the Early Years Foundation Stage are below what is expected for their age, particularly in calculation. Their mathematical development is good so that, by the end of the Reception Year, their skills are broadly in line with those of children of a similar age.
- Good progress continues through Key Stages 1 and 2 so that when pupils leave in Year 6 their attainment is above average. Since 2008, the school has had a small minority of pupils entering the school particularly in Key Stage 1; they are mostly boys who speak English as an additional language. These pupils initially made slow progress in mathematics. However, as their English language developed and well-tailored support was provided, they started to make good progress. Pupils with special

educational needs and or/disabilities also make good progress because they receive focused support.

- Pupils' behaviour is excellent in mathematics. Pupils are very attentive, remain focused throughout lessons and show a high level of respect for each other and adults. As pupils move through the school, they grow in confidence and independence in mathematics. This is particularly evident when pupils work in pairs and small groups where they ask questions and challenge each other readily.

Quality of teaching in mathematics

The quality of teaching in mathematics is good.

- Teaching of mathematics in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. The balance of teacher-led activities and those where children initiate their own learning is good. The quality and range of resources are also good. Adults work with children in small groups to ensure that they understand the early concepts needed for calculations. Children enjoy exploring outdoors, for instance when they gather twigs and count how many they have. Good questioning extends children's learning to find out, for example, how many more twigs are needed to reach five.
- Teaching is good overall in Key Stages 1 and 2. Teachers' planning and clear explanations and instructions ensure that pupils know what they have to learn in lessons. Teachers encourage pupils to ask and answer questions, which helps the development of their conceptual understanding.
- Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and they model use of appropriate vocabulary well, for example in helping pupils know how to read and compare statistical data. Teachers recap previous knowledge effectively, which checks pupils' understanding before moving their mathematical learning on. Teachers provide oral feedback to pupils when they mark their work. However, they do not consistently provide written feedback to help support pupils in the next steps in their learning.
- Teachers' monitoring of pupils' work during lessons is good. They ask questions not only to find out if pupils have understood the work but also to challenge and extend their thinking.
- Well-trained learning assistants are deployed effectively to support pupils, often those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Support is often provided in the classroom during lessons or sometimes outside the classroom for individual pupils who are following a specific programme.

Quality of the curriculum in mathematics

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is good.

- Teachers use the Primary National Strategy framework for planning mathematics on a two-year cycle. Throughout Key Stage 2, pupils work across the year groups with pupils of a similar ability in mathematics. This helps to ensure that support for all groups of pupils is good. Mathematics

is taught as a discrete subject and through some application of skills and knowledge in other subjects. However, this is not consistent enough to help pupils understand the importance of mathematics across the curriculum.

- Teachers make good use of information and communication technology (ICT) resources to present lessons which engage and stimulate pupils. Pupils have many opportunities to use not only computers but also a range of other ICT resources to extend and enrich their learning.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics

The effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics is good.

- The subject leader has an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in mathematics and has a clear vision for improvement. Regular monitoring is carried out and each term teachers monitor pupils' books together. The subject leader analyses individual pupils' assessments to check for gaps in their learning. She acts quickly on the findings, initiating an appropriate range of strategies to improve their attainment and progress.
- Although the subject leader monitors each pupil's progress effectively, greater rigour is required to ensure that leaders are always aware of the progress of all groups of pupils.
- Leaders communicate high expectations and staff share a common vision to aim high. Staff regularly receive mathematics training to ensure that they are up to date. Local support groups are attended and the subject leader shares information appropriately.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that pupils have more helpful written feedback on their work
- providing more opportunities for pupils to carry out mathematics in other subjects
- extending rigorous monitoring of pupils' progress to include different groups of pupils.

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

Sue J Sharkey
Additional Inspector