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Mr M Tatters
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Tatters

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 January 2012 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 parts of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is satisfactory.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is average.

- Many children join the school with skills that are lower than is typical for their age, particularly in language and communication but also in problem solving and reasoning.
- Attainment in mathematics at Key Stage 2 is broadly average although there is variability from year to year in the pupils' attainment in published test results. The proportion of the pupils who reached the standard expected of 11-year-olds, Level 4, was significantly lower than average in 2011, as was the proportion reaching Level 5. However, data on the current Year 6 indicate that 91% of the cohort is likely to gain Level 4 or better in 2012.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics also fluctuates from year to year. It is never better than satisfactory and has been too slow in some years.

Information on current Year 6 pupils indicates that 80% of the pupils are on track to make two or more levels of progress. The school has overcome the staffing turbulence which so negatively affected the Year 6 cohort of 2011.

- Rates of progress are similar for most groups of pupils. The school is particularly focused on supporting the progress of those pupils eligible for free school meals or identified as in need of intensive support as they achieve less well than other groups.
- The school's data show that the current Year 6 pupils have strengths in the quick recall of number facts but weaknesses in reasoning, and applying their skills to solving problems. For example, pupils were unable to relate fractional parts of shapes to positions on a number line.
- Pupils show genuine enthusiasm for mathematics in lessons and engage well with the activities. They particularly enjoy practical activities and work collaboratively in simple problem-solving activities.

Quality of teaching in mathematics

The quality of teaching in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Good features of the lessons include the range of resources and activities used to engage pupils' interest. Recent professional-development sessions included work on questioning and the use of language in mathematics. The impact of the latter was evident in the discussions among the pupils and in their work on averages. Other strengths in some lessons include work matched to the needs of different groups within the class.
- Good classroom organisation and detailed planning ensure smooth transitions between sections of the lessons. Pupils responded well to group and paired activities in the classes seen but opportunities to monitor the quality of the discussions and to assess the understanding of individual pupils are sometimes missed. In such cases, the teacher is not fully aware of how well pupils grasp the concepts underpinning the topic.
- Lessons are readily adapted within the classroom to allow for necessary interventions. For example, when pupils failed to appreciate that their answers were impossible, the teacher intervened to remind the pupils of what the 'mean' represented.
- Extensive support is provided for pupils through booster and other sessions. However, the selection of pupils to attend these interventions does not always match individual needs well enough. Pupils who are at the early stages of learning English are not all offered the support necessary to enable them to take part in the mathematics lesson.
- Marking is up to date and generally encouraging but does not always indicate how pupils can make the next steps.

Quality of the curriculum in mathematics

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is planned around a published scheme. This has the advantage of providing consistency, particularly given the staffing turbulence experienced by the school. Nevertheless, further guidance for staff could usefully be provided, identifying clear progression in mathematical topics throughout the school, to ensure that all staff have a good understanding of the hierarchy of mathematical concepts.
- Pupils have some opportunities to apply their mathematics within problem-solving sessions in mathematics lessons, but applications across the curriculum have not been clearly identified. Pupils experience some practical activities in mathematics lessons, often as an extension activity. They are not exploited fully to form useful introductions to topics.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics

The effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics is satisfactory.

- A senior leader has recently been appointed to lead the development of mathematics within the school. This is a significant task given the turnover of staff. Much work has been done in monitoring and evaluating the classroom practice of staff in mathematics and in identifying professional needs. However, the impact of the training activities has not always been sufficiently gauged. The evaluation of lessons observed jointly, although perceptive, was generous with regard to the mathematical understanding of staff and pupils.
- Information on pupils' attainment and progress is regularly captured. Interventions are put in place to remedy identified gaps in pupils' knowledge. Ongoing screening of pupils' progress through commercial tests assists the school in understanding the rate of pupils' progress and enables managers to make necessary interventions.
- The capacity to improve is sound and results from the honest and generally accurate assessment of areas of weakness as well as a willingness to take whatever steps are necessary to improve upon findings from monitoring activities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the mathematics coordinator has the necessary curriculum time to work with teachers to develop their mathematical understanding as well as focusing on the pupils' progress
- ensuring that support for individual pupils, including those at the early stages of learning English, is finely matched to their needs both in booster sessions and in lessons
- developing the scheme of work further so that it provides clearer progression through mathematical topics throughout the school
- identifying clearly where pupils can apply their mathematical knowledge and skills to problem solving across the curriculum and finding manageable ways to assess this work.

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

Sheila Nolan
Additional Inspector