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Mrs N Kearney
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Kearney

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 with Lee Northern HMI on 9 February 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 six lessons and two 'number time' sessions.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Children join the Early Years Foundation Stage with mathematical knowledge and skills lower overall than is typical for their age. They make good progress so that by the age of five they have closed the gap, with some reaching above-average standards. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 is similarly average, or just above. Pupils continue to make good progress and by the end of Key Stage 2, results of national tests show attainment is significantly above average, with a strong upward trend.
- Current pupils' good progress across the school was reflected in the work in their books and their learning and progress in lessons. The school's timely interventions when pupils falter ensure that they do not fall behind. Teaching assistants play a key role in this provision.
- The school's focus on number has secured pupils' fluency in the four operations, decimals and percentages. Their understanding of fractions is

weaker. All pupils have some opportunities to solve problems and investigate, with plenty of practical activities, particularly in the younger years. When solving word problems, pupils do not always show that they have interpreted their solutions by expressing their answer in words.

- The pupils are enthusiastic learners who sustain their concentration well. Although they often receive support from adults in lessons, they work well independently and in small groups. When given the opportunity, the pupils showed they can predict and generalise in mathematics.

Quality of teaching in mathematics

The quality of teaching in mathematics is good.

- Common strengths to the teaching were positive classroom relationships and well-established routines that set the scene for learning. Useful 'working walls' and displays supported pupils' learning.
- Characteristics of the good and outstanding teaching included the clarity about what pupils would learn and the sequencing of that learning. In Reception, for instance, the starter activity involved pupils in counting on from different numbers by putting the starting number in their heads. This laid the foundation for the next part of the lesson, the efficient addition of single-digit numbers. The pupils went on to record these sums as 'number sentences'. Skilful questioning was another feature of the stronger teaching. It checked pupils' understanding and ensured that key learning points were emphasised.
- Teachers provided a variety of interesting activities but did not consistently ensure that the tasks moved learning on well or represented efficient use of time. Occasionally, teachers missed opportunities to ask questions that would check or extend learning and thus pick up and tackle errors and misconceptions quickly.
- The quality of marking is good. Teachers mark specific work in detail and make comments or ask questions to which pupils always respond; for instance, when a pupil made some errors, a teacher demonstrated one solution and asked the pupil to complete two or three more. Another pupil was set an additional question when work was all correct. This marking often also made reference to learning objectives or targets being met.
- The Friday 'assessment lesson' is effective in checking the week's learning in a succinct way, while also feeding into assessment records and any need for intervention. These lessons also provide pupils with regular opportunities to use and apply their mathematics.

Quality of the curriculum in mathematics

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is good.

- The school has made good use of its assessment information to tailor the curriculum to pupils' needs. It has adapted the Primary National Strategy framework to ensure a focus on number at the start of the academic year, including weaker areas from the previous year's learning. While the daily

'number time' sessions keep pupils' skills and recall sharp, staff are also finding that pupils are becoming more fluent with problem solving because they can focus on the problem and not the mechanics of calculation.

- The school has a calculation policy but this has not been supplemented by discussion among all staff about progression from Nursery to Year 6. The school has identified that staff would benefit from further guidance on using the 'guided reasoning' sessions effectively.
- Focused intervention sessions support pupils of all abilities in overcoming difficulties. The most able pupils are challenged by work selected from the next year group's programme.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics

The effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics is good.

- The trend of rising standards, under your leadership, in Key Stages 1 and 2 is clear and good achievement has been maintained in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Senior leaders, the subject leader and staff are ambitious for the pupils. All are reflective and work effectively together, showing a readiness for and commitment to further improvement. The subject leader has recently completed the Mathematics Specialist Teacher programme. This is influencing her own practice and the development of teaching and the curriculum in mathematics.
- Analysis of assessment data informs intervention well and allows weak topics to be identified and tackled. However, the link with strengthening approaches to teaching these topics has not been explored.
- Leaders' evaluations of the lessons observed jointly were accurate and identified key mathematical elements of the teaching. However, records of monitoring have tended to be generic rather than focusing strongly on pupils' conceptual understanding and progression, and on the teaching approaches that underpin them.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- working as a whole staff to strengthen understanding of progression in different aspects of mathematics from Nursery to Year 6 and approaches that promote conceptual understanding and deepen pupils' learning
- paying greater attention to mathematical detail in monitoring activities.

I hope 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

Jane Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector