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Mrs J Monaghan
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Dear Mrs Monaghan

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit with Sarah Warboys, Additional Inspector, on 23 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 parts of seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is inadequate.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is inadequate.

- Children join the 4+ unit with mathematical knowledge and skills typical for their age. Although attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 was broadly average during the period 2008–10, it fell in 2011 when only 77% of the pupils reached Level 2, in comparison with 90% nationally. Of the seven pupils who did not, five were girls and no girls attained the higher Level 3.
- The results of national Key Stage 2 tests show a similar pattern of average attainment followed by a sharp fall in 2011. For three of the last four years, the results have represented inadequate progress from pupils' starting points. In 2011, 70% of the pupils reached the expected Level 4,

which is 10% below the national average, and yet four years earlier all had attained the expected Level 2. Girls' achievement was weaker than boys' in 2011, a pattern replicated in most year groups currently in the school. The school's assessment data and inspection evidence show that attainment is currently below average across Years 1 to 6.

- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning mathematics are good. Pupils follow the taught steps in methods carefully but a lack of curricular coherence means their learning is fragmented in the longer term and their conceptual understanding is not built progressively over time. Discussions with pupils show they have the potential to achieve much more. All showed a readiness to explore non-routine problems involving fractions, for instance. However, weak recall of number facts and inefficient calculation methods also impede pupils' progress.

Quality of teaching in mathematics

The quality of teaching in mathematics is inadequate.

- Although teaching was satisfactory or better in the majority of the observed lessons, important weaknesses lead to pupils' inadequate progress over time. Moreover, not enough of the teaching is consistently good to enable the current underachievement to be overcome.
- A fundamental weakness is teachers' lack of clarity about what pupils will learn, and how it relates to earlier and future learning. Lesson objectives are often not well defined or suitably matched to the chosen activities. This sometimes stems from weaknesses in teachers' knowledge of a topic or of approaches to teaching it that aid understanding. Regular use of 'success criteria' that describe steps in a method is creating an unhelpful dependency on memory. 'Rules' such as 'when you multiply, the answer will be bigger' are inaccurate and reinforce common misconceptions.
- Strengths of the better teaching include effective questioning. More generally, teachers vary in how well they circulate or use questioning to check pupils' understanding. While some encourage pupils to reason and make generalisations, others do not correct inaccurate statements or miss opportunities to respond to pupils' comments such as ' $21 \div 3$ must be odd because 21 and 3 are odd'.
- Marking is regular with good practice in Year 6 where pupils respond to useful 'development points' set by the teacher. Assessment was used effectively in one lesson to adapt it to meet pupils' needs and, in another, timely 'mini-plenaries' enabled teaching points to be made out of errors or misunderstanding. These teachers' deployment of other adults and choice of resources supported learning. By contrast, the weaker teaching did not use practical resources and images well to support pupils' learning; for instance, bead strings might have helped pupils to count in twos or fives.

Quality of the curriculum in mathematics

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is inadequate.

- It is the implementation of the curriculum rather than the school's intended curriculum that is inadequate. Teachers base their lesson plans on the Primary National Strategy framework and some also use a textbook scheme. However, the planning of units of work is often fragmented rather than cohesive. Important concepts are not developed consistently well, some topics are underemphasised or omitted, and links between topics are not forged. Progression within lessons, from lesson to lesson, and over time is not secured well enough. No guidance is provided for teachers on this. While teachers apply the calculation policy consistently, it results in older pupils using expanded rather than efficient methods.
- Pupils have various opportunities to use their mathematics in a range of interesting topics as part of the school's creative curriculum, although most applications relate to financial calculations, such as best value and profit. As well as solving problems within the topic work, pupils tackle word problems in lessons. However, some teachers expect pupils to use long-winded methods rather than encouraging independent thought.
- The school has increased the amount of time given to teaching mathematics by introducing a 'guided mathematics' session each day.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics

The effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics is inadequate.

- Leaders are aware that pupils' progress is not good enough and have endeavoured to bring about improvement through better monitoring of pupils' attainment and progress, analysis of pupils' performance in tests, coupled with interventions to plug identified gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills. While this has given leaders a better grasp of how well pupils are achieving, it has not enabled them to get to the heart of the problem. Information about pupils' difficulties has not led to discussion or training on how key mathematical ideas might be developed from age four to 11 or on the best teaching approaches to adopt.
- Following the results in 2011, you and other leaders have redoubled your efforts to improve achievement in mathematics. External support has been sought and weak teaching tackled. Reports to governors are frank and portray an accurate picture of current attainment and progress. Suitable monitoring activities, such as lesson observations, are carried out but these lack the required attention to mathematical detail to lead to improved teaching and learning. For instance, scrutiny of pupils' books does not consider the coverage and coherence of learning. Recent developments such as peer observation and co-coaching reflect teachers' willingness to improve their skills in teaching mathematics.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the quality of teaching by ensuring that:
 - the intended learning is clear, with activities well matched to the objectives and to pupils' starting points and potential
 - teachers understand and use approaches, models and images that promote conceptual understanding
- increasing the influence of leaders on driving improvement by:
 - focusing on mathematical detail within monitoring activities
 - being clear about the intended impact of initiatives, monitoring to check quality, and evaluating to gauge effectiveness
- seeking external support to help strengthen staff's subject knowledge and understanding of how pupils best learn mathematics.

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

Jane Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector