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9 March 2012

Mr J O'Brien
Headteacher
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Dear Mr O'Brien

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 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 three lessons as well as brief visits to four other lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Pupils attain consistently above average standards and make good progress in each year group. Improvements to teaching and the curriculum over the last three years have led to pupils gaining a deeper understanding of key concepts and have increased their ability to apply new skills and knowledge in a range of real-life situations.
- Most pupils use mathematical vocabulary accurately but some pupils who find mathematics difficult lack precision when explaining their reasoning.
- In all of the lessons seen, pupils thoroughly enjoyed tackling problems and investigating mathematical ideas. For example, Year 5 pupils used their knowledge of area and fractions with enthusiasm and persistence as they investigated how to accommodate different games and markings in the school playground.

- Pupils' books show that they work hard, apply themselves well and take great pride in their work.
- Some pupils struggle with learning the connections between fractions, decimals and percentages and do not always fully understand the link between fractions and division.

Quality of teaching in mathematics

The quality of teaching in mathematics is good.

- Teachers have high expectations of the pupils and set challenging targets for them. At the same time, they recognise when pupils have not fully grasped a new concept and allow extra time for consolidation, for example in 'maths hospital' sessions which the pupils really enjoy and which help to boost their confidence.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge is evident in the carefully planned tasks, which are focused on developing conceptual understanding as well as proficiency in skills and techniques. Tasks are tailored well to pupils' levels of understanding, both in the mixed-ability classes, and in the sets in Years 5 and 6 where three or four different activities match the needs of specific groups.
- This level of differentiation in planned activities reflects teachers' skilful ongoing assessment of pupils' understanding which is used well to modify the next day's lesson and to determine which pupils may need additional intervention. Focused support, provided in small groups and on a one-to-one basis, is successfully helping pupils to overcome difficulties.
- Teachers provide many valuable opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively, discussing and sharing ideas as they solve problems and investigate different ways of applying their knowledge and skills.
- Teachers skilfully identify pupils' errors and misconceptions during lessons and use these to reinforce their understanding through brief additional input to the whole class or a specific group. On occasions, misconceptions are not picked up and shared quickly enough to ensure that pupils make the best possible progress.

Quality of the curriculum in mathematics

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is good.

- Problem solving and investigations are integral to learning mathematics across the school and the curriculum is planned well to capitalise on links between current and past learning and between different areas of the subject.
- The curriculum is carefully planned to ensure progression for all groups of pupils. Opportunities for pupils to use and apply their knowledge and skills are central to every unit of work and throughout the school a strong emphasis is placed on active, practical learning in real-life contexts. Teachers are continually seeking ways to link mathematics with other subjects and evidence of successful work is in science, design and

technology, geography and art. Teachers and pupils make effective use of technology to reinforce learning and make it interesting.

- The school has introduced a useful document to underpin progression in fractions, decimals and percentages. This working document is currently being modified in the light of teachers' experiences to give clearer guidance about possible misconceptions and how to plan for them.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics

The effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics is good.

- Mathematics has been the main priority for school improvement over the last three years and all staff have been fully involved in implementing new policies, strategies and methodologies to raise achievement.
- Staff have benefited from a wide range of training and development opportunities, often led by mathematics specialists. In addition, senior staff lead regular in-house training meetings and teachers observe high-quality practice in other schools.
- The subject leader and Senior Leadership Team contribute very effectively to driving improvements in teaching, assessment and the mathematics curriculum.
- Self-evaluation is thorough and includes rigorous analysis of individual pupils' progress. Weekly pupil-progress meetings with individual teachers focus closely on pupils at risk of underachievement, evaluate the impact of teaching strategies and interventions, and determine next steps.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that pupils, especially those in the lower- and middle-attainment bands, develop greater depth of understanding of the links between fractions, decimals and percentages and the relationship between fractions and division.

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