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Mr H Martin
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Martin

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 Nick Brook on 20 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Children join the Early Years Foundation Stage with weaker mathematical knowledge and skills than are typical for their age. They make good progress, particularly in numbers as labels and for counting. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 1 has risen and is close to average overall, but girls' achievement is significantly stronger than boys'.
- A similar rising trend is evident at Key Stage 2 where girls' good progress and boys' accelerated progress has led to above-average attainment. In 2011, 91% of the pupils reached the expected Level 4 or higher and 35% Level 5. Gaps in the achievement of different groups have narrowed.
- The school's positive ethos for learning is striking. Pupils collaborate well with each other and their teachers, making the most of the time for

independent and group work. Scrutiny of pupils' books shows they solve a range of problems which demand a variety of approaches. While pupils' grasp of number is particularly strong, their conceptual understanding of some other topics, such as fractions, is less secure.

Quality of teaching in mathematics

The quality of teaching in mathematics is good.

- Strengths of the teaching include effective planning which incorporates interesting activities and helps sequence learning, making good use of time in lessons. Teachers pitch their questions well, giving pupils snappy opportunities to discuss their thinking with their 'talk partners'. Teachers and other adults circulate while pupils are working, making timely interventions to support individual pupils and, occasionally, to make a teaching point to the whole class.
- Some teaching observed during the visit was satisfactory. This related mainly to teachers' emphasis on how, rather than why, a method worked.
- Key Stage 2 teachers are exploiting the opportunities afforded by the new accommodation to adopt novel and flexible approaches, such as team teaching and innovative use of information and communication technology. Leaders recognise the need to evaluate the impact of these on learning.
- Some marking of pupils' work is excellent. This teacher has established a dialogue with the pupils through her marking which distinguishes between minor slips and more fundamental errors. Having pointed the way forward, she regularly sets a further question to check the pupil's understanding or to challenge a pupil whose learning is secure.

Quality of the curriculum in mathematics

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is good.

- Teachers use the Primary National Strategy framework for planning lessons, often jointly with the teacher of the parallel class. They share ideas and help each other. While teachers collaborate in planning the themes developed through the creative curriculum, in practice the links with mathematics are sometimes superficial.
- Pupils are given a good variety of practical activities and problems to solve. Because the problems require different approaches, they have to think for themselves rather than follow routine steps.
- Teachers apply the school's calculation policy consistently. For instance, pupils use blank number lines for subtraction, which supports their mental calculations well. However, the policy does not ensure that older pupils move on to the most efficient methods for calculation, for instance when working with decimals. In other areas of mathematics, teachers do not receive formal guidance on approaches that would support the development of pupils' conceptual understanding.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics

The effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics is good.

- A culture of high expectations pervades the school's work in mathematics and underpins its strong track record in improving outcomes.
- The subject leader's enthusiasm and reflective approach augurs well for the development of mathematics within the school and the 'Learning Hub'. A strong classroom practitioner, she is also developing her leadership skills effectively; for instance, she analyses pupils' test papers and uses her findings to focus the staff on the areas that are weaker. This led to the successful increased emphasis on calculation and variety in problem solving. You and she recognise that the next step is to strengthen the initial teaching of such topics in a coherent way across the school.
- Pupils' progress and attainment are monitored carefully and potential underachievement tackled. Other monitoring activities include scrutiny of pupils' work and observation of lessons. Teachers receive individual feedback but this tends to focus on generic features rather than pinpointing mathematics-specific strengths and/or areas for improvement. However, targets are followed up in the next round of monitoring.
- The action plan for mathematics contains appropriate objectives but the success criteria often relate to completion of tasks rather than capturing the intended impact of the actions.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing guidance for staff on approaches and activities that promote pupils' conceptual understanding and progression in key mathematical ideas from the Early Years Foundation Stage to Year 6
- increasing the attention given to the mathematical detail of pupils' learning and understanding of mathematics by:
 - leaders during lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work
 - teachers when marking pupils' work and through ongoing assessment in lessons.

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