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Mrs J Brown
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Brown

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 on 27 March 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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- The small numbers in different year groups mean that achievement can fluctuate from year to year. Children start school in the Early Years Foundation Stage with mathematical knowledge and skills that are usually below what is expected for their age, especially in calculation and shape, space and measures. Overall they make satisfactory progress. Recent changes in staffing and developments in the indoor and outdoor areas are leading to improved rates of progress.
- As pupils continue through the school, progress is good. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 is broadly average. The school has an increasing number of pupils who join and leave the school partway through Key Stages 1 and 2. The school has consequently made adjustments to the teaching to support those pupils in need of additional assistance in mathematics.

- The school provides good-quality support for pupils with disabilities and those with special educational needs, enabling them to make good progress.
- Pupils say that they enjoy mathematical lessons because they are often practical. Problem solving is a regular feature, although pupils do not get enough opportunities to solve real-life problems and to use the school's outdoor area for mathematics. Pupils' attitudes to work and their behaviour are good. Pupils work well in pairs and when collaborating in a group. They are confident to challenge each other, for example when Year 6 pupils were discussing the probability of climbing some local rocks after school.

Quality of teaching in mathematics

The quality of teaching in mathematics is good.

- Well-planned activities in the Early Years Foundation Stage make effective use of the indoor and outdoor spaces to give children good opportunities to practise their early mathematical skills. As well as initiating their own activities, children enjoy focused time with adults. For example, they concentrate when the teacher finds different lengths of ribbon in a box and begin to use appropriate vocabulary, such as 'longer than' or 'shorter than'. They use different units of measurement to make accurate comparisons.
- Teaching is good. The most effective teaching makes good use of pupils working in pairs. Pupils know what they are expected to learn. Teachers use questioning effectively to draw out ideas and evaluate pupils' learning but, occasionally, questions are not challenging enough to deepen pupils' mathematical understanding. Teachers' monitoring of activities, to check the understanding of groups or individual pupils, is effective and provides opportunities to clarify any misconceptions. Teachers' planning is generally good but occasionally lacks sufficient challenge for pupils who could aspire to the higher levels.
- Teaching assistants are a valued part of the team and work skilfully alongside teachers. They make sure that individuals and groups of pupils, particularly those needing support, have the help they require.

Quality of the curriculum in mathematics

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is good.

- The school adapts the Primary National Strategy framework to plan for mixed-age classes and pupils' interests. Mathematics is taught discretely as a subject and, following a curriculum review, pupils now have plenty of opportunities to develop and consolidate their skills through practical activities across other subjects. The positive impact is feeding through school and recent assessment data indicate that more pupils are making good and outstanding progress.

- Extra-curricular activities enrich the curriculum, extending mathematics beyond the school day. Pupils enjoy the cookery class which reinforces weighing, measuring and counting skills. Homework is used effectively to underpin the conceptual understanding developed during lessons.
- Teachers use interactive whiteboards well to illustrate learning and introduce different methods. However, pupils say they do not use information and communication technology (ICT) very often as a tool for mathematical learning.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics

The effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics is good.

- Leaders have ensured that teaching is consistently good across the school. Regular monitoring of lessons and pupils' work as well as staffing changes have established good and improving teaching. You and your senior colleagues know the school's strengths and weaknesses and are continually driving improvement.
- Regular monitoring of individual pupils' progress ensures that any potential underachievement or weaknesses in pupils' mathematical understanding is quickly identified and support provided.
- The school works closely with schools in the local cluster. Good use is made of joint training to ensure that staff are up to date and have strong subject knowledge. Joint lesson observations are also carried out in different schools to moderate judgements in teaching.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include

- developing problem solving further so that pupils have more opportunities to use and apply their knowledge and skills to solve real-life problems in the classroom and outdoors
- increasing the degree of challenge, including through questioning that deepens and extends understanding, so that more pupils aspire to and reach higher levels
- providing pupils with more opportunities to use ICT as a tool to learn and explore 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

Sue J Sharkey
Additional Inspector