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19 April 2012

Mr P Howieson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Howieson

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 five lessons and a working session with a small group of pupils.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is outstanding.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is outstanding.

- Progress made in mathematics is sustained and rapid across Years 4 to 7. The school's data and evidence collected during the inspection show that almost every pupil makes at least expected progress, irrespective of her/his starting point and the vast majority make good or outstanding progress. Differences in the relative performance of groups of pupils are not significant.
- By the end of Year 6, which is a year before the pupils currently leave the school, pupils' attainment in mathematics has been significantly above national averages for the last four years. This trend of high attainment continues into Year 7. In 2011, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels at age 11 was 51%. In addition, around one third of these pupils attained Level 6, the standard more usually expected from pupils aged 14 years.

- The emphasis on developing mathematical understanding while promoting secure calculation skills is strong. Pupils calculate fluently and most show a good mastery of standard and non-standard methods of calculation. They apply their skills regularly to solving word problems and complex challenges. Pupils express a love of the subject and show enthusiastic attitudes to it, including the key characteristic of persistence.

Quality of teaching in mathematics

The quality of teaching in mathematics is outstanding.

- Teaching that is consistently good or outstanding, coupled with pupils' very positive attitudes, is securing outstanding achievement. Common strengths in the teaching are teachers' good subject knowledge, an emphasis on the precise use of mathematical vocabulary at all times, very brisk pace to lessons and, above all, high expectations and challenge. The latter extends to basic number work as well as to more complex concepts such as algebra. Particularly strong elements of teaching are the use of practical sessions, detailed planning that is well matched to pupils' abilities, and regular use of new technologies to enliven learning in mathematics.
- As a consequence, pupils are very keen to contribute in lessons. Their behaviour is exemplary. Pupils also make links between aspects of mathematics and apply their secure knowledge readily in solving problems. This approach is encouraged by teachers. Occasionally, in a desire to cover subject content rapidly, teachers miss opportunities to offer pupils extended opportunities to discuss their thinking at length, relying instead on brief 'talk time'.
- Teachers' frequent questioning promotes understanding. Marking is accurate and up to date but not always developmental in nature.

Quality of the curriculum in mathematics

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is outstanding.

- The curriculum is rich and tailored appropriately to all pupils' needs. Activities are imaginative and 'hands-on' where possible, so pupils get frequent opportunities to apply their knowledge in a range of challenging contexts. The curriculum is enhanced by a wide range of additional activities such as mathematical challenges, competitions and extra clubs, and offers all pupils the chance to pitch themselves against the best regionally. Links with other schools are strong and a particular success is the way pupils can use their mathematical skills in entrepreneurial contexts. Recently, pupils enjoyed a 'high tea' at a nearby hotel following successful presentation of a business enterprise project based on financial planning.
- A relentless attention to reviewing and changing the curriculum to suit the needs of all is evident in the school's approach. For instance, the provision of an additional teaching group in Year 6, taught by the subject leader,

aims to raise further the proportion of pupils making at least expected progress during Key Stage 2.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics

The effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics is outstanding.

- Leadership in mathematics is responsive to individuals' needs and sets high expectations for pupils and staff. The school maintains a strong commitment to good-quality professional development of teachers and offers some innovative aspects. This includes a planned online video featuring the mathematics leader available to parents and carers via the school's website showing how the mathematics is taught in the school. There are also close links to other schools including the high school to challenge more able learners. However, the sharing of expertise within the school team is less well developed.
- This is a data rich school. Pupils' progress is monitored each term formally and weekly in informal ways. The assessment of pupils' progress in specific aspects of mathematics is accurate and converted into plans for improvement. By contrast, the monitoring of teaching of mathematics, although frequent and rigorous, occasionally lacks a specific focus and feedback tends to be generic rather than mathematical in nature.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- refining the monitoring of mathematics to highlight and then share good practice more routinely.

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

Ceri Morgan
Her Majesty's Inspector