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Mr M Ratchford  
Headteacher  
Castor CofE Primary School  
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Dear Mr Ratchford

### **Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 25 March 2013 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 a member of the governing body, staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; observation of three lessons; and brief visits to two other lessons.

### **The overall effectiveness of mathematics requires improvement.**

#### **Achievement in mathematics requires improvement.**

- Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with the mathematical skills and abilities that are expected for their age. At the end of Year 2, attainment is above average. By the time Year 6 pupils leave the school, it is slightly above the national average.
- Pupils, including those who need extra help, make progress in line with expected levels but too few pupils, particularly middle attainers, make good progress in Key Stage 2. The proportion of pupils achieving the higher levels at Key Stages 1 and 2 has increased in the past two years.
- Problem solving has been identified as a weaker area. Teachers have recognised that they have limited pupils' skills in the past by providing them with too much guidance on methods of recording. Recent work to develop a more open-ended approach to problem solving is already paying

dividends. Pupils are beginning to find their own ways to record their findings. They are increasingly able to identify patterns and relationships and to use these to draw conclusions.

- All pupils behave well in lessons and show positive attitudes to learning. Occasionally, and usually connected to teachers' long explanations, they become restless and their learning slows.

### **Teaching in mathematics requires improvement.**

- The best learning happens when class teachers use their good subject knowledge to provide pupils with clear explanations. They use precise, mathematical vocabulary and provide good models and examples so that pupils are clear about what they are learning. The teachers plan interesting contexts for learning that engage pupils and help to maintain their interest. In a Year 2 lesson, for example, pupils enthusiastically found simple fractions of shapes and quantities of ingredients to make 'medicine' for the class mascot, 'Eddie the eagle'.
- On the whole, teachers set work for pupils that is closely matched to their needs and abilities. Pupils' levels of engagement are high when they are actively involved in practical tasks and solving problems. However, teachers' introductions to lessons are too long and reduce the time pupils have to work on their own and find things out for themselves.
- Teachers' marking of pupils' work has improved recently. It consistently praises and encourages pupils for their efforts. It highlights what pupils need to do to improve their work and provides questions for them to consolidate their understanding.

### **The curriculum in mathematics requires improvement.**

- The Primary National Strategy Framework forms the basis for teachers' planning. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have lots of practical opportunities, for instance, to identify simple fractions of shapes and find fractions of small quantities. They are helped to understand the need for simple equivalent fractions to be equal in size, for example, when they shared Easter eggs between soft toy characters fairly.
- Progression in fractions throughout the school is insecure. Pupils repeat finding halves and quarters of shapes and quantities in Years 1 to 4, rather than moving on to more complex fractions. Scrutiny of pupils' books show that their knowledge and understanding of fractions are not developed in sufficient depth and do not allow pupils to build on their prior knowledge sufficiently well. Consequently, there is too much for pupils to learn about fractions in Years 5 and 6.
- Although pupils solve word problems regularly, opportunities for them to use and apply mathematics more widely are limited because problem-solving strategies and investigative approaches have not been taught explicitly and systematically until recently. In some classes, the overuse of worksheets restricts opportunities for pupils to record their work independently.

## **Leadership and management of mathematics requires improvement.**

- The school has experienced a period of unsettled leadership in recent years. You are, until you become full-time headteacher in July 2013, leading two schools. The deputy headteacher, who was new to the school in September 2012, is leading developments in mathematics on a temporary basis. Several members of staff are at the early stages of their teaching careers.
- You have already gained a good knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses in mathematics and are taking steps to improve teaching. Systems to support pupils who need extra help have very recently been reorganised to increase their effectiveness in speeding up pupils' rates of progress, especially in Key Stage 2.
- The deputy headteacher is providing clear leadership and support to colleagues by providing whole-staff training opportunities. Staff are working well together with a sense of urgency to learn from each other and improve their skills. Although leaders, including members of the governing body, are committed to making the necessary improvements and are taking the right actions, it is too early to see the impact of their actions on pupils' achievement.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- accelerating pupils' progress in Key Stage 2 and raising their attainment in mathematics by ensuring that all staff:
  - keep lesson introductions and explanations shorter so that pupils get more time to work on their own and find things out for themselves
  - place greater emphasis on pupils' independent recording of their work
  - build on recent, successful initiatives to provide regular opportunities to develop different approaches to problem solving.
- providing guidance for staff on securing progression in key mathematical ideas from the Reception class to Year 6.

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

**Sarah Warboys**  
**Additional Inspector**