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Mrs M Johnson
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Johnson

Ofsted 2013–14 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 5 February 2014 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: discussions with you, the leader for mathematics, teaching assistants and three pupils from Year 6; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of work of a sample of three pupils from each of Years 1, 3 and 5; and observation of six lessons, five carried out jointly with you and one with the leader for mathematics.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Pupils are highly numerate. By the end of Year 6, they have a good knowledge and understanding of place value, the four rules of number and strategies to carry out calculations confidently and accurately. Their skills in other mathematical aspects, particularly in conducting investigations and problem-solving across a wide range of contexts, are less well honed.
- Standards at the end of Year 2 have been consistently high for the last five years. However, the school is aware that generous judgements about pupils' attainment in previous years have led to some apparent faltering of progress at Key Stage 2. The current use of booster and support sessions to plug gaps and secure conceptual understanding has a beneficial impact.

- After a slight blip in 2012, the school's results in the 2013 end of Key Stage 2 tests, were again well above average. Three out of four pupils were working at a level more typical of pupils at least two years older. Current data indicate pupils in Years 2 and 6, including those eligible for pupil premium funding, are also on track to do well. Although girls' performance is stronger in the early years, boys really shine later.
- Pupils' work is very well presented: pupils take care in setting out calculations neatly. In all sessions seen, pupils worked conscientiously. Year 4 pupils persevered in solving problems related to negative and positive numbers and came to new insights and Year 2 pupils explained clearly the reasoning behind their answers to multiplication questions.

Teaching in mathematics is good.

- Strengths in the teaching ensure that pupils leave Year 6 as competent 'arithmeticians'. The school accepts that the focus on teaching the basic skills, with frequent practice of procedures, has underplayed the development of pupils as well-rounded 'mathematicians'.
- In all lessons seen, the teachers showed good subject knowledge but often chances were missed to probe pupils' understanding and/or to involve all pupils in answering questions by, for example, using resources such as number fans for pupils to show their responses.
- Where teaching and learning were most effective, pupils' enthusiasm was tangible as they worked independently and in groups. The adults mixed the imparting of information with inviting pupils to demonstrate and to explain their thinking. Misconceptions were highlighted and resolved, and steps forward in pupils' learning were recognised and praised.
- The marking of pupils' work is not aligned closely enough to helping pupils to move on in their learning. Similarly, pupils' targets, such as those linked only to learning multiplication tables, are too narrow to ensure progress.
- Not all activities are matched well enough to pupils' abilities. Pupils' books show that often all pupils do the same work with the less able completing less. Extension tasks are frequently too similar to the main task. The almost constant incidence of correct responses to, typically, 10 or 20 of the same type of calculation raises the issue of lack of challenge.

The curriculum in mathematics is good.

- The strength of the curriculum lies in the progression of learning, especially in calculations. Homework often complements this well.
- Although all pupils have the chance to solve word problems, this is most often using published worksheets and workbooks rather than an integral part of investigations and explorations arising from real-life situations, indoors and out, or from topics in other subjects, as well as problems that are inherently mathematical. Similarly, the value of technology, games, puzzles and challenges has not been fully realised to ensure a stimulating, wide mathematics curriculum for pupils of all ages.

- Teaching assistants play a key role in leading intervention and support sessions often using resources and ideas from published schemes. The recent introduction of record sheets is giving the leader in mathematics a clearer view of the impact of these sessions on the progress of pupils who are at risk of underachieving or who have special educational needs.

Leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- You and the leader for mathematics share a clear view of the school's strengths but know that some changes are needed to lift the overall effectiveness to outstanding. Your judgements about the quality of teaching seen were well rooted in the impact on pupils' learning.
- The leader for mathematics has undertaken specialist training and has an excellent understanding of the breadth of primary mathematics. In sharing with staff her knowledge of current national developments, the key findings from Ofsted's reports on mathematics, and the areas of relative weakness in pupils' responses in tests, she has highlighted priorities for action which reflect in large part the areas for improvement below.
- You make effective use of information from half-termly reviews of pupils' attainment and progress to identify and monitor those pupils who are, or are at risk of, underachieving. Data from the local authority gives useful benchmark information but there is scope to draw even more on national comparative data to give a critical evaluation of how well differing groups of pupils fare and where it is necessary to close gaps in attainment.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- providing more opportunities for practical and investigative work to ensure that pupils use and apply their mathematical knowledge and skills
- developing teachers' marking and the setting of targets to give pupils a clear view of how well they are doing and what will lead to improvement
- refining teachers' skills in posing questions that foster pupils' skills in explaining and justifying their mathematical reasoning
- making even better use of national data to evaluate the attainment and progress of different groups of pupils in all year groups and thus inform the setting of targets and decisions about provision.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop mathematics in the school.

As explained previously, 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

Sonja Øyen
Her Majesty's Inspector