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Mr A Neenan
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Neenan

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 7 April 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: interviews with staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; an analysis of pupils' work; and observation of four lessons and a session working with a small group of pupils.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics requires improvement.

Achievement in mathematics requires improvement.

- In 2013, the school was among the highest performing in the country for attainment in mathematics. Pupils aged seven years attained significantly above national expectations in mathematics. All of them reached the expected level at the end of Year 2 and over half reached the higher levels. This strong performance was mirrored by results at the end of Year 6. Here, 87% achieved the expected level, as was the case for the previous year.
- However, this strong test performance masks some significant variation in progress as pupils pass through the school. While the school has a number of significant strengths in mathematics, with some rapid improvements stemming from recent changes to leadership of the subject, pupils'

progress and understanding is slow in some classes and year groups. This unevenness in achievement is evident in both key stages.

- Too few pupils of high ability make the progress of which they are capable.
- In some classes, such as Year 3, pupils have a fragile understanding of number with misconceptions about place value. These pupils do not always know appropriate multiplication facts and, as a consequence, are unable to apply this knowledge to solve simple word problems. By contrast, Year 6 pupils can solve complex problems because they are comfortable with standard methods of calculation and able and willing to try out alternative methods. In one lesson, for instance, pupils solved complicated timetabling problems using real-life information with enthusiasm.

Teaching in mathematics requires improvement.

- Examples of good teaching, particularly in Year 6, were characterised by high levels of subject knowledge and pacey, lively delivery which maintained pupils' enthusiasm. However, in some other classes, teachers' expectations were low and the work prepared for pupils not well matched to their needs or capabilities.
- Teachers have varying degrees of confidence in their own subject knowledge. This means that on occasion in some classes, pupils' misunderstandings remained while teachers stuck rigidly to what was planned rather than responding to the questions and comments of the pupils during the sessions. This was not the case in all classes however and, in the best sessions, teachers adapted the content as the lesson unfolded to reflect and deepen pupils' understanding.
- The quality of teachers' questioning is variable. In some classes, questions were perceptive and challenging. They prompted pupils to think hard or rethink. In other classes, teachers' questions were unclear or pitched at too easy a level, or limited to simple yes or no answers that did not require pupils to explain their reasoning.

The curriculum in mathematics requires improvement.

- The planned curriculum is appropriate and has the required balance between core number skills and problem solving. Some thoughtful work being carried out by the mathematics leaders to secure the implementation of the new National Curriculum in the future. However, despite these strengths, the curriculum pupils experience in some classes is less interesting and much is left for 'catch up' in subsequent years where topics have not been covered well enough. Previously, too much reliance was placed on routine practice in the run up to tests rather than developing pupils' genuine understanding.
- Good use of additional resources enhances the curriculum. Some exciting innovative work using new technology via the use of mini tablet computers

is specifically planned to develop understanding and the application of problem-solving skills in greater depth.

Leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- Leadership in mathematics has undergone significant change in the last year. A new subject leader has recently joined the school and together you have galvanised change. In a short period you have carried out an effective review of provision, resources, teaching expertise and outcomes for pupils. You have reviewed the number policy, marking of mathematics, and have carried out an analysis of the relative strengths and weaknesses of mathematics within the school. You have correctly identified that, while test scores are very high, progress as pupils pass through the school shows underlying variation and that some pupils who do well following test rehearsal do not always have the deeper understanding that enables effective problem solving.
- A useful school action plan aims to reduce the variation in pupils' progress and teaching quality across the school. Staff training has been completed, including on the new National Curriculum, and staff show strong support for the changes being introduced. These developments have been achieved in a short period and indicate a good capacity to improve further.
- Leaders have an accurate view of standards and have started to monitor the quality of teaching in mathematics. However, monitoring is generic in nature and does not therefore pinpoint the subject-specific aspects that require improving in teaching and learning mathematics.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing a monitoring programme to drive improvement and reduce variation in the quality of teaching and pupils' progress in mathematics, ensuring sufficient emphasis is placed on subject-specific detail and the relative needs of different groups of pupils
- ensuring the curriculum is delivered consistently well to avoid 'catch up' in some year groups
- providing the most able pupils with high challenge to improve the numbers of pupils reaching the higher levels in national Key Stage 2 assessments.

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

Ceri Morgan
Her Majesty's Inspector