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Mrs T Lawton
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Dear Mrs Lawton

Ofsted 2014–15 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 13 May 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 staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observations of four part lessons, conducted jointly with you.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics requires improvement.

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Nearly all children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with mathematical skills and abilities that are in line with or above those expected for their age. Most start Year 1 having achieved or exceeded the expected outcomes in the Reception classes.
- By the time they complete Year 2, nearly all pupils are working at the expected level for their age and the majority are working above this. Over a number of years, pupils' attainment has been consistently above the national average and has shown some improvement in the proportion of pupils reaching higher levels in mathematics.
- The achievement of groups of pupils is more variable. In 2013, the gaps in achievement between the small numbers of pupils who are supported by the pupil premium, have special educational needs, or are from minority ethnic backgrounds, and their peers were greater than the national figures. However, current data suggest an improved picture for 2014.

- Most pupils are enthusiastic about learning mathematics although some told me that they were given easy work and were bored sometimes. The school works hard to give pupils enjoyable and meaningful experiences inside and outside the classroom and pupils respond well to this.

Teaching in mathematics requires improvement.

- The school has experienced some challenges in staffing this year that have affected the overall quality of teaching in mathematics. Some features reflect stronger practice, but they are not consistent across the school.
- Most teachers explain mathematical methods carefully so that pupils can carry out the tasks they are set. However, the extent to which teachers plan for and develop pupils' mathematical reasoning and understanding requires improvement. For example, pupils in Year 2 were asked to answer calculations written in words based on their pet shop theme but none of these problems gave pupils the opportunity to explore different possible answers or think deeply about the mathematics required. In contrast, a teacher challenged Year 1 pupils by giving them different totals and asking them to find sets of three numbers that summed to each total.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children show curiosity and are interested in exploring mathematical ideas but adults frequently miss opportunities to develop mathematical understanding in children's play.
- Too often, support from adults focuses on prompting pupils to achieve the correct answer, rather than on developing pupils' understanding, or on directing pupils' every step, limiting pupils' ability to think for themselves.
- Teachers mark pupils work regularly but not all of their comments spot misconceptions or help pupils to make better progress, and pupils do not consistently respond to them when asked, so opportunities to make better progress and check understanding are missed.

The curriculum in mathematics requires improvement.

- Teachers' planning is based on a scheme that identifies gaps in pupils' understanding of basic skills. However, insufficient guidance is provided for teachers on approaches to teaching that secure pupils' deeper understanding of mathematical concepts.
- Mathematical themes are included in other subjects, for example, a project on baking biscuits and collecting data in science. However, links with strands in mathematics are not clear. As a result, sequences of learning do not build pupils' understanding systematically enough.

Leadership and management of mathematics require improvement.

- During our joint observations, your evaluation of the quality of teaching seen was accurate. You are clear that greater consistency in teaching is needed and that opportunities to develop learning points in children's play need to be seized more readily.
- The action plan for mathematics focuses on the developing the wider curriculum and implementing the new National Curriculum in September.

However, it does not focus enough on pinpointing current weaknesses in teaching and actions to address them. Similarly, although the development of mathematics in other subjects is prioritised, aspects of investigative work to develop pupils' reasoning and deepen their understanding in the core mathematics curriculum are not identified.

- The subject leader is a positive advocate for mathematics. Through school-based training, she has provided helpful advice to teachers and trainee teachers. Aspects of training have focused on introducing structures for learning and starter activities for lessons; however, these are not embedded consistently throughout the school.
- An appropriate range of monitoring activities is undertaken but these do not dig deeply enough into approaches to teaching, or check on progression in sequences of learning and that links between strands of mathematics consistently build pupils' understanding.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the quality and consistency of teaching across the school by:
 - sharing stronger practice within the school to develop teachers' subject knowledge and underpin a sharper focus on developing pupils' mathematical understanding and reasoning skills
 - improving teachers' planning for progression across sequences of lessons in key strands of mathematics, and increasing the focus on problem-solving and investigation
 - ensuring adults in the Early Years Foundation Stage capitalise on opportunities to develop mathematical learning in children's play.
 - ensuring teachers' marking and feedback consistently identify and address misconceptions, coupled with opportunities for pupils to respond and improve their work
- strengthening the curriculum by providing guidance for staff on:
 - teaching approaches that promote conceptual understanding and develop mathematical reasoning
 - securing progression in key mathematical ideas from Nursery to Year 2
- strengthening subject leadership in mathematics by:
 - sharpening the action plan for mathematics to include foci on progression and the development of pupils' conceptual understanding, investigative skills and mathematical reasoning
 - ensuring that plans for the new National Curriculum include clear links between aspects of mathematics and appropriate guidance for teachers
 - increasing the focus on mathematical understanding and progression in monitoring activities and feedback to teachers.

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.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Guy
Her Majesty's Inspector