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Mr M Lonsdale
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Dear Mr Lonsdale

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 with Dale Burr, Seconded Inspector, on 15 October 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 observation of nine part lessons and two intervention sessions to look at teaching and learning in mathematics across the school.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics requires improvement.

Leadership and management of mathematics require improvement.

- Your evaluation of strengths, weaknesses and variability in the quality teaching and learning of mathematics across the school are honest and accurate. You are aware of the need to develop the curriculum and the effectiveness of teaching to ensure standards rise.
- Hitherto the subject leader has carried out little monitoring of the quality of provision in mathematics. Consequently, leaders' impact on teaching and learning within mathematics has been hampered, particularly for younger pupils. This has begun to change with leaders' new impetus to ensure teachers receive training to improve teaching approaches and raise standards.
- Your school improvement plans identify the priorities of improving the quality of teaching in mathematics and ensuring the needs of all pupils are met in lessons. However, these foci are not threaded through your subject

action plan which focuses currently on ensuring the subject is well resourced rather than detailing actions required to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' learning.

The curriculum in mathematics requires improvement.

- The school has purchased a published mathematics scheme to help to implement the requirements of the new national curriculum which was introduced in September. However, insufficient guidance is provided for teachers on approaches to teaching that secure pupils' deeper understanding of mathematical concepts and develop pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills.
- A strong focus is placed on regular testing in mathematics, particularly to encourage rapid recall of number facts to aid pupils' fluency. However, the careful unpicking of pupils' responses to identify their misconceptions and mathematical reasoning is not then used to inform approaches to teaching which can help pupils to develop their understanding and reasoning skills.

Teaching in mathematics requires improvement.

- Most teachers explain mathematical methods and activities 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, match work accurately enough to pupils' different abilities, and deepen pupils' understanding, for example through more open-ended or investigative work, requires improvement.
- In Reception, teaching does not build children's understanding of mathematical concepts carefully enough and focuses too heavily on how children use mathematical apparatus to complete the tasks they are set. For example, in one activity the teacher used coloured plastic counting shapes in which the number of holes matches the number represented by the shape, with each number a particular colour. She asked the children simply to guess the colour of the shape, missing the opportunity to think about and explore the properties of the number represented by the shape.
- Teachers and teaching assistants are caring and supportive. Nevertheless, leaders are aware that pupils' progress in lessons is often impeded by over-helpful adults who focus their support on completing the activity or getting to the answers quickly rather than ensuring that pupils understand fully the concepts so that they can work out answers for themselves.
- Although teachers mark pupils' work regularly, their comments do not pinpoint misconceptions or help pupils to make better progress. Moreover, pupils do not respond to comments when asked, so that chances to make better progress and check understanding are missed.

Achievement in mathematics is requires improvement.

- Pupils are interested in mathematics. They are keen to do well and most work diligently in lessons. However, too often the work they are given does not place enough emphasis on mathematical reasoning or provide sufficient opportunities to use and apply what they have been taught.

Consequently, pupils are not challenged to think deeply enough and the most-able pupils are not stretched sufficiently.

- Most children enter the Reception Year with mathematical skills and abilities that are in line with or above those typical for their age. A slightly smaller proportion starts Year 1 having achieved expected outcomes in the Reception classes.
- Most pupils make expected progress in Key Stage 1. However, as in the Reception Year, a few pupils do not make up the ground they need to. One of the reasons for this is that the work pupils are set lacks challenge and the simple responses required limits their thinking.
- Pupils' progress is stronger in Key Stage 2 and most pupils achieve the expected standard in Year 6. However, not enough pupils achieve the higher levels in mathematics, mainly because their ability to reason and solve mathematical problems is less well developed. Sometimes, pupils' misconceptions hamper their understanding of mathematical ideas.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising achievement throughout the school, particularly of the most-able and of younger pupils, by:
 - strengthening teachers' subject knowledge to underpin a greater focus on developing pupils' mathematical understanding and reasoning skills
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to engage in problem-solving and open-ended activities
 - ensuring teachers' marking and feedback consistently identify and address misconceptions, and provide opportunities for pupils to respond and improve their work
- providing training and guidance for staff on:
 - teaching approaches that promote conceptual understanding and develop mathematical reasoning
- strengthening subject leadership in mathematics by:
 - sharpening the action plan for mathematics to include foci on improving the quality of teaching and the development of pupils' conceptual understanding and mathematical reasoning
 - ensuring that monitoring activities support the school's priorities in mathematics and give enough detail about mathematical approaches to teaching and learning in 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