



16 October 2006

Mr S Ford
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Dear Mr Ford

Ofsted 2006-07 survey inspection programme – mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 28 September 2006 to look at work in mathematics. As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on pupils' enjoyment and understanding of 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the subject, mathematics, was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Standards in the National Curriculum tests for pupils in Year 6 in 2006 were average. When considered in the light of these pupils' previous attainment, this indicates just satisfactory progress. The best performance was by pupils of average or better capability. As pupils leave in Year 8, prior to the Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests, there is no externally verified data on their performance. However, school data, confirmed by observations in the school, show progress moves up a gear in Key Stage 3 and in Year 8 standards are above expectations, indicating good progress by all pupils.
- In lessons, behaviour is generally good, although pupils and the school report some pockets of weaker behaviour in Key Stage 2, generally associated with pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities, which has an impact on

learning in some lessons. Nevertheless, pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to mathematics, both in lessons and discussion.

- Pupils have few opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning apart from when they carry out investigative activities.
- However, pupils are not sure of exactly how well they are doing and are unaware of any targets for their future learning, and so are not sure exactly what to do to improve.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching is satisfactory overall.

- Strengths in teaching include teachers' good levels of subject knowledge and understanding of how pupils learn, an infectious enthusiasm for the subject, and rigorous expectations of what pupils will be able to achieve.
- However, in some classes, a narrow range of techniques to manage behaviour is evident, and this has an impact on the pace of lessons, especially in Key Stage 2. Whilst pupils enjoy lessons and eagerly answer questions, some learning focuses on teaching methods rather than understanding.
- Classes are formed on the basis of prior attainment but there remains a breadth of ability in a set. However, in most lessons, all pupils did the same work and informal assessment in class was not used to amend the tasks given to individuals to match their needs more closely beyond having extension work available for those who finished first, who are not necessarily the most capable.
- Pupils in danger of underachievement are identified through sound assessment and they have good quality individual plans to help them catch up, though these were not seen actually in use in lessons.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum covers all the required elements and includes progressively harder work. Whilst the written scheme of work does not formally identify opportunities for pupils to engage in practical and investigative activities, an analysis of pupils' completed work and observations in lessons show sound provision for this.
- There is little evidence, however, that information and communication technology is used to support learning, although whiteboards linked to a computer are in use to enhance teaching in some classrooms.
- There is no guidance for teachers on how tasks might be varied to suit the needs of different pupils, and this has a particular impact on the progress of the least capable. The provision noted above, in terms of educational action plans, has the potential to go some way towards improving this provision. Nevertheless, there is some enhancement, especially for the most capable, in terms of the school's participation national competitions.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- Satisfactory leadership and management have maintained standards in the subject, although there is still some way to go before achievement in Key Stage 2 and of the least capable matches that of the best performing pupils.
- The departmental handbook sets out a clear vision in which pupils really enjoy mathematics and achieve their potential. All of the team subscribe to this vision, which has a positive impact on pupils' attitudes to the subject.
- The school keeps rigorous and well organised assessments of pupils' progress each term. However, whilst the department's self evaluation is broadly accurate, it lacks rigour and data could be better organised to identify trends; as a result its usefulness in improving provision is limited. Nevertheless, day-to-day management is organised effectively.

Subject issue: pupils' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

In discussion, pupils were clear that they enjoy mathematics. They described an enjoyable lesson where they had to be 'maths detectives', trying to find the meaning of some words like 'product'. However, they could also recall lessons that were not so exciting, for example, on the rare occasions when they complete work from a textbook rather than from the board. Whilst they could recall times that they had been able to work successfully without understanding, a key example being algebra, they also found that the use of a new approach, using a game, developed their understanding better. When lessons are lively and investigative, pupils rise to the challenge with excitement and enthusiasm – this was seen when pupils in Year 6 tackled a problem about the Fibonacci sequence – but some lessons do rely more on rote methods and these are less inspiring, so that pupils can become restless.

Inclusion

The school meets the needs of pupils satisfactorily overall. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are supported in lessons although they still make less progress than their peers. Progress for pupils in Key Stage 2 lags behind that in Key Stage 3. Within lessons, tasks are not always amended enough to ensure that all pupils are challenged beyond their 'comfort zone'. Pupils themselves said that the work they do was occasionally too easy but rarely too hard.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raise pupils' achievement, especially in Key Stage 2 and by the least capable, in particular by ensuring that short-term assessment is used effectively to match tasks to pupils' needs more closely
- employ more rigorous self-evaluation so that pupils in danger of underachievement are readily identified, strengths in teaching are shared and weaknesses eradicated.

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

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Ian Knight
Additional Inspector