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Dear Mrs Luke

Ofsted 2006-07 survey inspection programme – mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit with my colleague Allan Torr HMI on 16 October 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, and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of five lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

- Children's mathematical development on entry to the Reception class is slightly below average. Pupils make satisfactory progress in Reception and Key Stage 1; their performance in national tests in Year 2 fluctuates over time in line with the range of abilities in the year group. Currently, standards are average in Year 2.
- Pupils' results in national tests in Year 6 fell to below average in 2005 and declined further in 2006. The school analysed the reasons for this, which are complex. They include fundamental weaknesses in pupils' knowledge, understanding and application of mathematics. Consequently, standards are below average in Year 6.

- The school is receiving support for mathematics from the local authority through an Intensifying Support Programme. Pupils' progress this term is satisfactory, but, overall, achievement in Years 3 to 6 is unsatisfactory because a significant proportion of lower and middle ability pupils have a legacy of underachievement from previous years. Other boys and girls, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have made satisfactory progress over time because their work has been more closely directed. The current programme of well-focused activity has not yet had time to influence results.

Quality of teaching and learning

- Teaching is satisfactory in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. It is improving this term in Key Stage 2, although still inadequate.
- Evidence from assessment data and pupils' books highlights inconsistencies in practices and expectations. This is because work is not always planned suitably for pupils of different ability and marking does not indicate clearly enough how the work could be improved.
- Training and support from the local authority are bringing about an improvement in teaching, and hence learning, but, as yet, information from assessment is not being collected frequently enough to identify and remedy underachievement. Hence, some pupils are not being challenged to work at their full potential.

Quality of the curriculum

- The curriculum follows the Primary National Strategy and embraces the development of skills in literacy and information communication technology, which are used satisfactorily in lessons.
- The school has identified pupils' lack of spontaneity in the use of multiplication facts, particularly for division, as an area for improvement. In addition, evidence from the inspection highlights the absence of regular opportunities for pupils in Years 3 to 6 to test out their learning in problem-solving and open-ended exercises.
- Mental agility and the manipulation of number facts have been the key foci in all classes this half term. Teachers report that most pupils have met the targets set.
- Good provision is made for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They receive support that is well directed towards their precise needs, as does the group of pupils targeted for additional support through the Springboard project.

Leadership and management

- The leadership and management of mathematics are inadequate at present because the action taken by the new subject leader has not had time to impact sufficiently on pupils' learning.

- Self-critical analysis of results, the curriculum, teaching, and assessment procedures has identified aspects requiring improvement. These include training issues and teachers' accountability for the progress of pupils in their classes over the year. Initial action, involving the local authority, is resulting in green shoots of improvement but there is still a long way to go.

Subject issue: pupils' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

Younger pupils enjoy mathematics. They are curious and gain pleasure from practical work and trying things out for themselves, such as in the mixed-age Year 1-2 class when pupils worked out the cost of shopping that included items marked 'buy one get one half price'. Older pupils are not as obviously enthusiastic about the subject. They gain satisfaction from 'getting the right answers' but are less confident when solving problems and thinking things out for themselves. Consequently, they need considerable reassurance when translating word problems to numerical operations. Most do not recall having been taught strategies to help them solve problems. This is being tackled as a matter of urgency in Year 6 where pupils are responding well to new challenges and a faster pace of working.

Inclusion

Not all pupils in the school achieve equally well because the teaching and assessment procedures do not systematically lead to underachievement being rectified. As a result, some lower and middle ability pupils in Key Stage 2 perform below their potential and below the targets set for them at the end of each year. For some, there has been a legacy of underachievement over two or three years.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raise standards in mathematics in Key Stage 2
- assess pupils' work at frequent intervals during the year and take action to rectify underachievement
- include more problem-solving exercises in lessons.

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

June Tracey
Additional Inspector