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Mr M Goddard
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Dear Mr Goddard

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 Carole Skinner, Additional Inspector, on 19 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 seven lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

- Children enter reception with standards similar to those typically found, but by the end of Year 6, standards are exceptionally high. Standards at the end of reception are above average, and they rise further to be well above average in Year 2. This profile reflects outstanding achievement by all groups in the school.
- Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities or who are in danger of underachievement are identified very quickly and rigorously tracked to ensure they have the best possible chance of catching up. As a result, practically all pupils gain at least the expected levels.
- The most capable are stretched very effectively in lessons and through specialist teaching in small groups. Consequently, the proportion of pupils gaining the higher levels is high.

- Pupils are eager, articulate learners who behave exceptionally well in lessons and really enjoy themselves. They say that the teachers are 'fun teachers' who help them and give them challenging work.

Quality of teaching and learning

- The principal reason for the outstanding achievement throughout the school is teaching that is excellent. Rigorous planning that identifies how tasks will be amended to suit different groups, how assessment will be carried out and the role of other adults forms the foundation of lessons that move quickly, use a variety of approaches and successfully engage all pupils. Good questioning, that includes all pupils, generates thoughtful responses from them and deepens their understanding.
- Investigative and practical methods are well to the fore, and computer-linked whiteboards are used particularly well by teachers to support teaching and by pupils to support learning. However, the school has plans to improve pupils' learning further by more and better use of information and communication technology (ICT) and practical and investigative methods.
- Assessment, both informal and formal, is used very effectively to ensure that pupils maximise their progress. Already noted is the highly effective tracking system that keeps close tabs on pupils in danger of underachievement. Short-term informal assessment is also used well; for example, in a lesson for the most capable Year 6 pupils, the teacher quickly realised that the planned tasks about equivalence of fractions were thoroughly understood and moved on to a more general discussion of equivalence of different patterns on grids.
- However, pupils were not sure what National Curriculum level they were working at, nor what exactly they'd need to do to achieve the next one and, although this omission has no obvious impact on their progress, it means that pupils are not as fully involved in evaluating their achievements as they might be.

Quality of the curriculum

- The scheme of work is based on the Primary National Strategy and incorporates the use of ICT as well as practical and investigative methods within it. Strong links are forged between mathematics and other subjects, including the successful mathematics and art week in the summer. However, the school is aware that there is still scope for further use of ICT to bolster understanding even further.
- The combination of whole-class teaching on most days with some specialist teaching in smaller groups formed on the basis of prior attainment is proving effective in ensuring that all pupils do the best that they can.

Leadership and management

- A thorough understanding of how pupils learn and understand mathematics is at the heart of the outstanding leadership and management of the subject in the school, and is a major factor in the outstanding provision.

- Assessment is managed exceptionally well and, as noted, is a factor in ensuring that pupils make rapid progress.
- Very effective self-evaluation identifies strengths and areas for development rigorously. However, the resulting action plan lacks precise criteria by which its success can be measured.

Subject issue: pupils' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

In discussion, pupils were clear that they enjoy mathematics because of the quality of teaching and because lessons are fun. They enjoy the fact that they use mathematics in other subjects, and were especially appreciative of the combined mathematics and art week, when pupils in Year 6 took the lead in presenting mathematical problems. Pupils also demonstrated good understanding in lessons and in discussion, when they were able, for example, to give cogent reasons why the sum of two odd numbers is necessarily even.

Inclusion

The identification of pupils in danger of underachievement or capable of the highest standards is carried out rigorously and all receive support through the curriculum and within lessons where tasks are closely matched to the needs of individuals. The excellent outcome is a school that is truly inclusive.

The school knows exactly where it is going as it continues to strive for excellence in mathematics. The inspection has raised no new areas for improvement.

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