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Miss J Thorley
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Dear Miss Thorley

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 Gill Close HMI on 12 March 2007 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: discussions with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Standards in National Curriculum assessments in 2006 were broadly average in both Years 2 and 6. They have been maintained at a similar level for some time. The school is aware that one reason that standards are not rising faster is that fewer pupils than might be expected gain the highest levels.
- Children get a good start in Reception and overall progress is satisfactory. The high turnover of pupils, especially in Key Stage 2, has had an impact on progress. Scrutiny of the school's own data on pupils' progress, their completed work and the varying level of challenge in lessons confirms that achievement is satisfactory.

- Pupils are generally keen and enjoy their lessons. They behave well and are articulate. However, when work lacks challenge, they sometimes lapse into some off-task conversation.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are satisfactory.

- In Reception, a range of well-chosen activities enables children to progress well.
- Many lessons make effective use of 'talking partners', practical activities and interactive whiteboards to motivate pupils and generate independence in learning. However, this developing independence is restricted because, although the objectives for lessons are shared with pupils, they are not involved enough in assessing their own performance in reaching them. Most assessment does not allow for easy conversion to National Curriculum levels to help pupils know just how well they are doing.
- In some lessons, pupils spend too much time listening passively, which has an impact on the pace of learning. Opportunities are missed to use questioning that helps pupils think hard about their work and make connections.
- Teaching assistants are deployed effectively to support pupils, especially those with particular needs, often helping them successfully to explore mathematical ideas and methods.
- Positive relationships enable pupils to feel confident and unafraid of making mistakes.
- The level of challenge for the most capable is inconsistent. This has already been identified by the school as an area for development and is confirmed by observations. Target-setting is not individual enough, nor used sufficiently in lessons. This lack of rigorous targets for each pupil is a factor in the lack of challenge for the most capable.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- The use of exemplar unit plans from the Primary National Strategy, amended and annotated to fit the school's needs, ensures that pupils meet progressively harder work as they advance through the school.
- However, the current curriculum does not consistently challenge the most capable, nor include enough emphasis on practical and investigative methods or the hands-on use of information and communication technology (ICT) by pupils.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- The recently appointed co-ordinator has a sound grasp of the strengths of provision and the areas that need further development.

- Recent monitoring and evaluation have correctly identified areas for development in the school, including the consistency of the challenge for the most capable and the teaching of shape and space and problem-solving. Positive outcomes of monitoring include the improved use of 'talking partners'.
- Judgements by senior managers about teaching are not related closely enough to learning and progress and are consequently sometimes generous.
- The co-ordinator is aware that assessments are not recorded in a way that allows them to be used effectively as a management tool.

Subject issue: pupils' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

Pupils say they enjoy mathematics. They are presented with opportunities to reinforce their understanding using a variety of methods. These include practical work and the use of interactive whiteboards, and serve to generate enthusiasm. However, opportunities are missed in lessons to develop understanding through rigorous questioning, independent working by pupils and the hands-on use of ICT.

Inclusion

Inclusion is satisfactory. Pupils joining the school are welcomed effectively so that they quickly feel at home there. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities receive effective support from teaching assistants that enables them to join in whole class sessions and to make progress when working individually or in groups. However, the challenge presented to the most capable is not consistently high enough.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improve the use of assessment to promote better progress, especially by the most capable, setting rigorous short-term measurable targets for each pupil
- ensure teaching consistently meets the needs of all pupils in the class and supports them in making good progress
- monitor teaching more rigorously and ensure that its quality is improved as a result.

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