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Dear Mrs Marshall

Ofsted 2007-08 survey inspection programme – mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 5 July 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. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

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 parts of seven lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good. Standards are above average.

- Attainment on entry to the school is below average. Pupils make consistently good progress and achieve well as they move through the school.
- Standards are improving in response to improvements in teaching and outstanding leadership of the subject. Standards are now above the national average, with a clear trend of improvement throughout the school.

- Although pupils have a good understanding of mathematical concepts, they are not always able to explain their thinking or the strategies they use to work out problems. The school has identified mathematical vocabulary as a focus for improvement.
- Pupils thoroughly enjoy mathematics lessons and participate with enthusiasm. They work equally well in groups on practical tasks and independently on written activities.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good, and sometimes outstanding.

- Outstanding teaching in the Reception classes brought mathematics to life for the children. Not only did they experience subtraction by 'taking away' raisins and slices of banana and eating them, but they learned about the importance of healthy eating at the same time. Others had great fun following directions as pirates seeking treasure or programming a robotic toy to follow a trail.
- Throughout the school, teachers' planning is very good, clearly showing the different activities that are planned for each group according to their needs and previous levels of attainment.
- Teaching in every class is lively, fast paced and very carefully focused on pupils' learning, mostly through an imaginative range of practical activities which engage pupils' interest and generate enthusiasm.
- More able pupils were challenged exceptionally well in an outstanding Year 2 lesson where the teacher's excellent questioning extended their reasoning skills.
- In a few lessons, teachers miss opportunities to ask pupils to explain the strategies they use or to suggest alternatives. Consequently, some pupils do not develop sufficient fluency and confidence in using mathematical language.
- Regular assessments are used effectively to inform teachers' planning and, at the end of Year 1, to determine the setting arrangements for Year 2.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is planned and modified effectively in response to pupils' needs. For example, analysis of test results showed that problem solving was a relatively weaker area. As a result, there is now a strong emphasis on problem-solving activities in each year group.
- The Reception curriculum provides children with an exciting variety of activities that promote mathematical development in imaginative ways across all areas of learning.
- In Years 1 and 2, the use of mathematics in other areas of the curriculum has been identified by the school as an aspect that requires further development in order to develop pupils' understanding of the relevance and usefulness of the subject in everyday life.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are outstanding.

- Subject leadership is a team effort in this small school, with you at the helm. Your exceptionally rigorous analysis of pupils' performance gives all staff a very clear picture of what is working well and where improvement is needed. It also leads to timely interventions for pupils who need additional support.
- Excellent teamwork amongst all staff ensures a consistent approach to teaching and learning. Teaching assistants are deployed very effectively to ensure that support is targeted where it is most needed.
- Rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching, pupils' work and teachers' planning ensures a constant focus on providing the best possible learning experiences for all pupils.
- Robust assessment and systems for setting targets and tracking progress are a driving force in raising standards.
- The flexible setting arrangements in Year 2 are carefully monitored and their impact measured. This has been notable, especially in boosting the achievement of the more able pupils.

Subject issue: pupils' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

Pupils enjoy mathematics lessons and all take part eagerly in whole class, group and independent activities. They particularly enjoy the many practical activities that are planned for them. Pupils are given frequent opportunities to work out their own strategies for solving a problem, but they are not always encouraged to explain their working in sufficient depth or to suggest alternative methods. Some do not have a sufficiently good grasp of mathematical vocabulary to do this confidently and articulately. Pupils have a good understanding of most aspects of mathematics and are developing a good capability to use their mathematical knowledge and skills in new situations. Their understanding of the relevance of mathematics to everyday life is less secure.

Inclusion

Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress because teachers plan activities for them that match their particular needs and capabilities. They receive good support in lessons and are sometimes taken out for specific small group activities that reinforce previous learning. Very good support for traveller children and pupils learning to speak English as an additional language enables them to achieve well.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- extend pupils' mathematical vocabulary in order to increase their confidence and ability to explain their reasoning and the strategies they use when solving problems and making calculations
- develop pupils' mathematical skills and knowledge across the curriculum in order to increase their understanding of the relevance of mathematics in everyday life.

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

Carole Skinner
Additional Inspector