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Mr Ian Dixon  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Dixon

Ofsted 2007-08 survey inspection programme – mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 30 October 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. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

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

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

Achievement and standards

Pupils achieve well. Standards have been broadly similar to the national picture for some years but are now showing signs of improvement as new teaching and assessment strategies take effect.

- Pupils make good progress from below average starting points to reach broadly average standards by the time they leave the school. Progress has not been consistently good in the past due to inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and assessment, but these have now largely been ironed out and standards are rising.

- Pupils demonstrate sound understanding of mathematical concepts and are able to apply existing knowledge and skills in new and unfamiliar contexts.
- Sometimes, weaknesses in pupils' language and communication skills restrict their ability to explain their reasoning and the strategies they use. A few pupils do not perform as well as they should in formal test situations because their reading and comprehension skills are not sufficiently well developed.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and are enthusiastic in mathematics lessons. They concentrate well and work sensibly, both independently and when working with a partner.

### Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good.

- The teachers' infectious enthusiasm for mathematics and their good subject knowledge make learning enjoyable for the pupils. As one pupil put it, 'The teachers really enjoy maths and this helps us'.
- Lessons are well planned and organised and teachers move learning along at a brisk pace. This enables pupils to make good progress in acquiring new skills and knowledge.
- There is a strong focus on learning through 'hands-on' activities that relate well to pupils' daily experiences. This contributes well to their understanding and enjoyment of mathematics.
- Work is differentiated effectively to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and the more able pupils. Grouping Year 6 pupils into sets by ability is helping to accelerate their progress.
- A greater emphasis on oral work and mathematical vocabulary is helping pupils to become more proficient in explaining their reasoning but this is not yet done consistently well across the school.

### Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- The school has adopted the new numeracy framework with enthusiasm. Teachers continually review and evaluate the effectiveness of the planned curriculum.
- Information and communication technology is used very well throughout the school to enrich pupils' understanding and promote enjoyment.
- As the revised curriculum takes shape, teachers are planning ways to incorporate more effective cross-curricular links, for example in design and technology and art.

### Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good.

- You have a good overview of the subject and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning in collaboration with the subject manager.
- The subject manager is bubbling with enthusiasm for mathematics and has a good understanding of the subject's strengths and priorities for improvement. She provides good support and guidance for colleagues in every class.
- Thorough self-evaluation informs the subject action plan which has a clear focus on raising standards.
- Teaching assistants are deployed effectively and are well-briefed. They provide good support for pupils in lessons and in small groups.
- The school has recently adopted new systems for tracking pupils' progress. In the past, records simply showed progress from one year to the next rather than throughout the course of each year. As a result, there was no 'early warning system' to flag up pupils who were not making enough progress from term to term. More frequent assessments have been introduced which are aimed at improving this situation.

Subject issue: pupils' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

Pupils enjoy mathematics lessons a great deal and speak with enthusiasm about the way they are taught. They particularly enjoy the way teachers use interactive whiteboards to teach them new ideas and say that this helps them to understand better. They also enjoy opportunities to discuss and work things out with a partner. Pupils demonstrate sound understanding of mathematical concepts and language, but are not always able to express their ideas succinctly or explain their reasoning clearly. Developing pupils' speaking and listening skills has been identified as a whole-school priority for improvement.

Inclusion

Inclusion is good. The school was quick to respond to data which showed that girls had not done as well as boys in recent national tests and assessments. Thorough analysis of the underlying reasons and close scrutiny of the progress being made by girls in general have established that this was specific to those cohorts of pupils rather than a general trend. Good provision for pupils with learning difficulties and the more able ensures that all pupils' needs are being met through class lessons and additional support programmes.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- sharpening the arrangements for tracking pupils' progress throughout each year in order to identify early signs of underachievement and put support in place promptly for pupils who are falling behind
- developing pupils' skills in explaining their reasoning and the strategies they use clearly and succinctly in correct mathematical language.

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