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17 January 2008

Mrs J Cottam-Marshall
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Dear Mrs Cottam-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 15 January 2008 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 observation of three lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement is satisfactory. Standards are broadly average.

- Children's mathematical development on entry to the school is similar to others of age 3/4 years. Pupils make satisfactory progress in the Foundation Stage and throughout the school. By Year 6, almost all reach the standard expected for their age (Level 4) and some exceed it. Because the numbers in each year group are very small, it is not generally meaningful to compare results in tests taken in Year 6 with national statistics.

- Pupils are competent in manipulating numbers and in applying routine mathematical skills. They are less confident when working through problems written in words or where there are alternative approaches.
- The mathematics targets for 2008 are challenging, but achievable.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are satisfactory.

- The rigorous evaluation of teaching and assessment procedures last term, and subsequent action, is leading to rising levels of challenge for pupils of all abilities.
- Oral work is well planned and is increasing pupils' confidence in working with numbers mentally. Planning for problem solving and investigative work is less consistent. Where it is good, pupils reason well and delve deep into their previous learning for answers.
- Support from a well-directed team of teaching assistants is effective because it focuses accurately on needs that are pinpointed through the upgraded and well-designed assessment system.
- Written work is marked thoroughly, providing pupils with meaningful comments about how to improve.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is stimulating and flexible. High priority is given to the integral development of pupils' language, communication and mathematical skills.
- The organisation of the mixed-age classes is good. It enables pupils of different ages to work with others at a similar stage of learning. The success they achieve when working collaboratively raises their confidence and self-esteem.
- Strategic planning incorporates good opportunities for pupils to apply mathematics to other subjects of the curriculum. Older pupils describe clearly how mathematics enables them to reach conclusions in the work they do in science, geography and history.
- The most able pupils in Year 6 enjoy and benefit from opportunities to apply critical thinking skills and logic to mathematical problems in master classes arranged for them this year at a local high school. They share these experiences with their classmates in Year 6 so that all benefit.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good.

- You and the subject co-ordinator were new to the positions in September 2007. Collaborative leadership and self-critical evaluation of every aspect of the work in mathematics, including pupils' results and progress, has led to a rise in expectations and significant improvement in the consistency of pupils' work,

particularly in Years 5 and 6. Consequently, standards are rising and progress is faster than before, as is evident from the current assessment records.

- Leaders and governors are challenging and proactive in determining what can be improved in mathematics, and how. They prioritise areas for improvement and are rigorous in checking the outcomes of actions on pupils' progress in the subject.

Subject issue: pupils' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

Pupils and teachers are responding well to recent changes and initiatives. Pupils appear to enjoy mathematics, particularly when the work extends beyond the routine of repetitive exercises. Pupils of all ages become excited when they reason difficult things out for themselves. Teachers could capitalise on this by providing more opportunities for pupils to tackle open-ended questions and reach their own conclusions. Pupils enjoy solving simple problems. They have clear strategies for dealing with them but need more practice with complex problems that involve a number of operations.

Inclusion

Provision in mathematics for the needs of pupils of all abilities, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is satisfactory. Pupils' personal development and respect for others are indicative of the good quality wrap-round care provided by the school. Pupils mature well in this small community because good relationships between the staff and pupils foster a sense of calm and well-being. Pupils leave the school with secure foundations in basic mathematical skills.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- providing pupils with regular opportunities for open-ended investigative work by integrating this into the strategic planning for all classes
- sustaining the current level of challenge in mathematics by teachers in order to raise achievement further for all pupils.

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