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Miss Tracey Smith
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Dear Miss Smith

Ofsted 2007-08 survey inspection programme – mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 22 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 observations of parts of six lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Pupils' achievement is good and standards are similar to national averages.

- Pupils start school with below average knowledge and skills and make good progress. This includes the high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties.
- Standards vary significantly due to the small number of pupils in each year group. They are rising steadily in response to improvements in teaching and assessment.
- Pupils make faster progress in mathematics than in English. They often know how to tackle problems but are not always able to explain their reasoning or express ideas clearly and concisely using the correct mathematical language. This improves as pupils move up through the school.

- Positive attitudes to learning ensure that pupils listen well, participate in discussions with enthusiasm and apply themselves to tasks in lessons with obvious enjoyment.
- Pupils work well together in pairs and small groups, often sharing ideas and learning from each other.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good.

- The school has taken decisive steps to improve the quality of teaching and learning over the past two years through a whole school focus on mathematics.
- Teachers and support staff all work with pupils to ensure they are fully and actively engaged in whole class sessions.
- Group and individual tasks are planned well to meet each pupil's needs. Work requires pupils to think and reason, make connections and identify patterns.
- Pupils know their targets and are beginning to check their own progress towards them.
- Teachers devise homework tasks that are relevant to pupils' targets so that parents can provide purposeful support for their children's learning.
- Sometimes, teachers do not challenge pupils to explain the methods they have used in sufficient detail or ask other pupils to suggest alternative strategies for solving a problem.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- There is a strong focus on using and applying mathematics and solving problems in real-life contexts. For example, Year 5/6 pupils were 'shopping' in the January sales, checking the 'reduced' tags on items of clothing and calculating the percentage reduction and sale price of each item.
- Effective links with other subjects, such as science, art and geography, enhance pupils' understanding of mathematics.
- Careful planning ensures progression in learning from one year to the next and consistency between the two Year 3/4 classes.
- There are missed opportunities for presenting and consolidating new ideas through the use of computer technology, especially when introducing complex concepts such as fractions.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good.

- You and subject leader have a good understanding of the strengths and relative weaknesses of the subject. Together you set challenging targets for each pupil and have introduced rigorous assessment procedures. These are still being refined to improve their accuracy and include regular 'assessment weeks' when senior leaders discuss the progress of individual pupils with class teachers.

- Rigorous analysis of assessment and tracking information identifies pupils who need additional support programmes to accelerate their learning.
- Regular observations of teaching and learning and scrutiny of pupils' work help to determine appropriate priorities in the subject action plan.
- Due to the recent high turnover of staff, the leadership and management are just beginning to introduce the revised national framework for mathematics and are supporting new and inexperienced teachers in implementing the school's policy.

Subject issue: pupils' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

Pupils thoroughly enjoy mathematics lessons, especially when they involve practical 'hands on' learning. They like discussing ideas with a partner or in a small group. Year 1/2 pupils were buzzing with enthusiasm as they worked out ways to estimate and then measure the building blocks to make Cinderella's castle. Pupils have a good understanding of mathematical ideas and use their knowledge and skills well to solve problems. Pupils say their targets are useful because they show them what they need to do to get better. They say that teachers help them to understand by asking them to explain how they work things out. Older pupils have step-by-step guidelines for problem-solving in the back of their books and they say they these are useful and help them understand how to tackle a problem.

Inclusion

Inclusion is good. Thorough planning in each of the four mixed age classes meets the needs of pupils in different year groups and ensures progression in learning from year to year. Girls and boys do equally well because teachers know pupils' individual needs and where there are gaps in their learning. Pupils with learning difficulties are given good support, both in lessons and through additional intervention groups. The most able pupils benefit from working on mathematical challenges with pupils from a local secondary school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- develop pupils' ability to use mathematical language with clarity when explaining their reasoning and the processes they use when solving problems
- ensure that all teachers make effective use of information and communication technology to enhance pupils' learning.

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