Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
www.ofsted.gov.uk

raising standards
improving lives

08 February 2008

Ms Karen Jackson
Headteacher
Westfield Middle School
Chester Road
Bedford
Bedfordshire
MK40 4HW

Dear Ms Jackson

Ofsted 2007-08 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 24 January 2008 to look at work in mathematics.

As outlined previously, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the effectiveness of the school's approaches to improving the quality of teaching and learning in 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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included interviews with senior leaders, the subject co-ordinator and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation and pupils' work and observation of four lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and progress are good. Standards are below average.

- Pupils join the school with well below average levels of attainment. Few come from homes where English is the first language spoken. Some lower attaining pupils have weak calculation strategies and number skills.
- However, standards in mathematics are only just below average by the end of Year 8 because pupils make good progress during their four years in the school.
- Progress is good for three main reasons: good teaching that uses active learning to develop pupils' understanding; regular self-assessment; and a well developed system for tracking pupils' progress and intervening with those who underachieve.
- The school has good community links, including strong partnerships with the nearby upper and lower schools. The three schools accept a shared responsibility for ensuring pupils' good progress from Year 2 to Year 11.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in mathematics is good.

- The inspection confirmed the school's self-evaluation. The subject benefits from a stable team of teachers and a tradition of active learning, which is particularly beneficial for the large number of pupils who are still learning English.
- The best teaching and learning in mathematics engages and interests pupils through a variety of thought-provoking tasks. Teachers make good use of teaching assistants and language support.
- Occasionally, there are minor gaps in teachers' subject knowledge, such as the one we discussed in relation to inverse operations.
- Assessment is effective in promoting learning. Good use is made of written comments and teachers follow up their marking to ensure learning is secured.
- Teachers monitor pupils' self-assessment, because pupils sometimes say (or perhaps think) that they understand more than they do. Improving self-assessment skills is part of the current school improvement plan.

Quality of the curriculum

The mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- Pupils enjoy mathematics in most lessons, especially practical activities. They strong philosophy of active learning helps them achieve well. However, the philosophy is not documented in the Key Stage 3 scheme of work, where the National Strategy's exemplar has not been adjusted to reflect the school's needs.
- Although there is regular observation of lessons and informal discussion about teaching approaches, the scheme of work is not annotated to guide teachers' planning. For example, following a lesson on inverse operations, we agreed that it would be better not to allow pupils to use calculators for repeated subtraction and addition of 11, since the learning objective was for pupils to learn how to use inverse operations to check their answers. The lesson could also have reinforced the use of the number line for calculation, by splitting 11 into 10 + 1.
- There is some inconsistency in the opportunities provided for pupils to use and apply mathematics or to use computer applications such as graph plotters, geometry packages or spreadsheets to support their learning of mathematics.
- The curriculum has other strengths, including the use of interactive whiteboards and online homework; the school-designed 'Year 6 toolkit' booklet, which supports revision; and a mentoring programme and mathematics challenges for able pupils.

Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- You hold the subject leader in high regard and encourage her to share her expertise within and beyond the school. She monitors teaching and learning through lesson observation and in subject meetings, where work scrutiny is carried out collectively. She has a clear sense of what needs to be improved and regularly provides support and ideas for colleagues to raise quality. However, the good ideas are not formalised, for example as annotations to the scheme of work, so their long-term impact is difficult to evaluate.

- You articulate your vision well and have a clear understanding of the school's general and mathematics-specific strengths and weaknesses.
- In contrast, the documentary record is less well established. The improvement plan provides clarity about the actions that are needed but does not quantify the demands on the school's management or financial capacity. Nor does it routinely specify its success criteria in terms of specific and measurable targets.
- You are currently bringing the school's self-evaluation up to date and identifying ways of building capacity for further improvement, such as training middle managers in monitoring and evaluation techniques.

Subject issue: the effectiveness of the school's approaches to improving the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics

- Professional development is a mix of formal courses, consultant visits, mentoring, and observation. Teachers can apply for support to attend courses and, if necessary, the school seeks out bespoke professional development.
- Much professional development relies on informal discussion and collaboration. However, you are confident that support from senior leaders and the subject co-ordinator can be tailored to need whenever required.
- Support from consultants is satisfactory. In particular, support for the pilot of the new primary framework has been good, but training on geometry software was less effective. It introduced the skills but did not develop a lesson sequence for teachers to try with pupils.

Inclusion

- Teachers have data about pupils' progress and potential. The small size of the school means that they know pupils well and can respond to individual needs.
- Achievement in mathematics is good for most minority groups but low attaining boys and pupils with learning difficulties made below average progress in 2007.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that improvement plans have measurable success criteria and quantify the time and other resources that will be needed
- developing an approach to monitoring that systematically identifies ways of improving mathematics teaching and turns them into guidance for teachers, for example by annotating the schemes of work
- ensure that all pupils have appropriate opportunities to learn to use and apply mathematics and to use computer applications to support mathematics learning.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop mathematics.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott
Her Majesty's Inspector