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Dear Mr Lynch

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 4 February 2008 to look at work in mathematics.

As outlined in our initial letter, 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 my interviews with you, the mathematics co-ordinator and three Year 6 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, brief analysis of pupils' work and observation of two lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement in mathematics is outstanding and standards are well above average.

- Pupils' Foundation Stage profiles show that their mathematical skills are initially a little below average. Pupils progress well in Key Stage 1 and in most years, standards are above average by the age of 7. They then make outstanding further progress in Key Stage 2. In the last four years, every pupil has reached or exceeded the expected Level 4 in mathematics.
- A major reason for the outstanding progress of all pupils is the excellent teaching, which meets their individual needs very well. Pupils are well prepared for their Key Stage 2 tests, but without sacrificing the breadth of curriculum and enrichment that makes the school special.

Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is outstanding.

- Teaching is outstanding. Teachers plan their lessons to meet the needs of all pupils in their mixed-age classes. Lessons proceed at a brisk pace and feature a variety of activities. The most able pupils are stretched and those with learning difficulties are supported exceptionally well because teachers think very carefully about the roles of their teaching assistants.
- Teaching is focused very well on developing conceptual understanding. This is part of the school's ethos and all teachers believe strongly in developing pupils' understanding and in the importance of their personal development progressing alongside the learning of mathematics. For example, in the Year 5/6 lesson, the teacher made regular reference to a place-value diagram to reinforce understanding of multiplying and dividing by 10, 100 and 1000. As a result, pupils were confidently converting from small to larger units of distance.
- Lessons include opportunities for pupils to apply mathematics in novel situations, supported by good questioning by the teacher and regular discussion of ideas among pupils. They also include opportunities for pupils to work on their own or in groups, giving the teacher time to circulate purposefully to form a detailed picture of each pupil's progress. For example, one teacher quickly spotted the only two pupils who had not got started on their work and moved them on with brief guidance and encouragement, returning a few minutes later to check on their progress. This attention to detail plays an important part in catering for the mixed-age classes.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is good.

- The new primary framework is being used in Key Stage 2, but the school is keeping ideas that have worked well previously and is therefore using the new materials selectively. 'Using and applying mathematics' is integrated into many lessons as part of the school's general approach to teaching and learning.
- Staff and pupils have good access to information and communication technology (ICT), given the constraints of the accommodation. Pupils get equal access within each class. The school has been cautious in its adoption of ICT, using it only when there is demonstrable benefit, such as in promoting better understanding.
- The revision programme for Key Stage 2 tests is proportionate and builds on the outstanding day-to-day teaching. From January onwards, Year 6 pupils complete practice test papers for homework and have weekly booster classes. At the same time, the school continues to explore cross-curricular themes, such as the Chinese New Year, which involves a production in the village hall and many related curriculum links, including mathematics.

Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are outstanding.

- As headteacher, you have established a clear ethos and vision for the school. You and the other staff ensure that pupils learn how to conduct themselves so that they and others can learn. You place a high value on a broad curriculum that

enhances pupils' personal development. In mathematics, this is demonstrated by the school's outstanding emphasis on 'using and applying mathematics'.

- The quality of lesson observation is very good. You and the mathematics co-ordinator were both able to identify the many strengths of the teaching you had observed. You checked carefully that all pupils were learning.
- The co-ordinator has good subject knowledge in mathematics and an excellent understanding of pedagogy. She has accurately identified the key priorities in her evaluation of mathematics. The improvement plan is costed and indicates the broad improvements that are intended but does not usually quantify them in terms of pupils' progress. This is understandable in the context of a small school, where one pupil represents ten per cent of the year group.

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

- Because the school is so small, the teaching team is constantly discussing ideas. Professional development is mainly informal. Much of this happens spontaneously at the end of day when teachers talk informally about individual pupils, share ideas and learn from each other through reflective discussion.
- In mathematics, Key Stage 2 teachers are now using the revised framework, suitably adapted for mixed-age classes. They are developing assessments beyond the optional tests that are used each year, enhancing the use of assessment as a tool for learning. You have found that pupils have made excellent progress with number strategies and problem solving as a result of this development.

Inclusion

Inclusion in mathematics is outstanding.

- Achievement is excellent for able pupils and the third of pupils who have learning difficulties or disabilities. A key reason is that the school ensures that all pupils are well prepared for learning, by paying close attention to their personal development.
- The curriculum provides equal opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding, use and apply mathematics and use ICT in mathematics.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- formalising guidance for teachers on successful teaching approaches, including effective uses of ICT and using and applying mathematics.

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

As explained in our 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