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Mr S Gamble
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Dear Mr Gamble

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 7 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 interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of parts of five lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory and standards are average.

- Following a dip in 2007 when standards fell to below average levels and a significant proportion of pupils did not make the gains that they should, action has been taken to boost the rate of progress.
- This has had a positive impact for pupils in Year 6. These pupils are making progress at a good rate and standards are set to improve this year to broadly average levels. The proportion of pupils attaining the higher Level 5, which fell to below the national average in 2007, has improved with around a third of the year group at or close to this level.
- As you have identified, progress is uneven through the school. There are particular issues to address in Years 4 and 5 where a significant proportion of pupils, often of average ability, have not made gains at the expected rate. Clear

targets have been set to improve the rate of progress in each year group. It is too early to see the impact of this but good steps have been taken to raise teachers' awareness of maintaining consistent progress.

- In lessons observed, almost all pupils showed good application to their work. There were good examples of pupils informally collaborating and sharing ideas for tackling the tasks set.
- Year 6 pupils have gained confidence and competence this year. They are keen to succeed and are well aware of the levels that they are attaining and what they need to do to improve.

Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is satisfactory.

- Teachers are beginning to make effective use of assessment of pupils' understanding to adjust planning and the teaching strategies being used, but this is not yet established practice in every lesson.
- Teaching assistants are generally well used to support groups and individuals. In many instances they make a very valuable contribution to learning through reinforcing key teaching points and giving demonstrations or explanations to support pupils' understanding of new concepts.
- The use of tracking systems, together with a sharper focus on pupils who are not making expected progress, are helping to guide planning for different levels of ability. However, there is still work to do to ensure that tasks consistently meet pupils' needs.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is being adapted to take account of the new primary framework and to introduce clearer progression of skills in planning. This is in the early stages but is rightly seen as a key to ensuring more consistent progress for pupils through the school.
- Good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) to support teaching and learning. This is particularly effective in enabling pupils to apply what they have learned, revise a particular concept or test their knowledge.
- New arrangements for homework are having a positive impact. This is well planned to link with work in lessons. Pupils are clear about expectations of homework and parents and carers are encouraged to become involved where possible.

Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are satisfactory.

- Senior leaders have an accurate view of the key areas for improvement.
- A range of monitoring activities generates useful information on strengths and weaknesses in provision. However, these are not summarised to provide an overview of key areas for improvement and this means that action planning lacks a sharp focus on where teaching and learning need to be improved.

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

- The curriculum group is an effective forum for disseminating information and trialling new materials to support teaching and learning.
- The subject leader, who is an advanced skills teacher, has good subject expertise and has been well used to support three newly qualified teachers this year. However, opportunities for her to develop teaching skills across the school are limited because of time constraints. She has a significant commitment to supporting other schools in the local authority.

Inclusion

Inclusion in mathematics is satisfactory.

- There were differences in the performance of boys and girls in Year 6 in 2007, with a significant proportion of boys of average ability not achieving as well as they should. This has been explored further and the school has identified that, while there is no general trend in terms of gender difference, occasionally boys are reluctant to be seen to succeed. Steps are being taken to address this but it is too early to see the impact.
- The achievement of pupils from minority ethnic groups is in line with that of their peers.
- There are good arrangements to support pupils with learning difficulties, including those from the resource base who join mainstream lessons for mathematics, with teaching assistants making a valuable contribution to ensure their full participation.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that all pupils, particularly those of average ability, make progress at a consistent rate in year groups through the school
- sharing the most effective practice in using assessments of pupils' understanding of new concepts to adjust and adapt planning and teaching
- ensuring that key development points identified in monitoring activities are summarised, disseminated and followed through.

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

Shirley Billington
Additional Inspector