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Mrs S Smith
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Smith

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 13 March 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.

- There was an improvement in pupils' performance in national tests at the end of Year 6 in 2007. The school's data suggests that this improvement will be maintained this year. The school has successfully tackled past underachievement and, as a result, progress for a significant proportion of pupils in Years 5 and 6 is good and they are making up lost ground. More able pupils are making satisfactory progress but need greater challenge to enable more of them attain higher levels at the end of Year 6.
- Standards at the end of Year 2 have improved and the majority of pupils are attaining the level expected. Few are predicted to attain Level 3; there is scope for more able pupils to make faster progress.

- Throughout the school, rigorous tracking and analysis of assessment data are used well to identify pupils who are not reaching expected levels and to provide extra support to boost their learning. This is proving successful in increasing the proportion of pupils on track to reach national expectations in each year group.
- Pupils enjoy mathematics. They respond well to the frequent opportunities they are given to discuss ideas with their talk partners during lessons. Year 6 pupils are positive about the introduction of more problem-solving activities that 'make them think'. They are aware of their targets but are not always sure of what they mean or how well they are doing in relation to meeting them.

Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is good.

- Weak teaching has been eradicated and strategies to improve the overall quality have proved successful. Teachers explain learning objectives to pupils so that they understand the skills and knowledge that they need to apply to the tasks set. Teachers make good use of interactive whiteboards and other resources to engage pupils and to support their learning.
- Teachers and teaching assistants use time well to support individual pupils and small groups. They check pupils' understanding, revisit and clarify key ideas, demonstrate calculating processes and quickly pick up on any misconceptions. This is supporting good progress in lessons for the majority of pupils.
- There is a very good focus on ensuring pupils' understanding of particular concepts and how to apply these. Just occasionally, this slows the pace of learning for more able pupils who, for example, demonstrate good understanding of efficient methods for calculation and quickly arrive at solutions to problems. However, they sometimes work through the same range of tasks as their peers before they are given an extension activity.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is good.

- Good adaptations have been made to the curriculum to increase opportunities for 'using and applying mathematics'. This is a strong feature in planning which is well focused on the development and application of key concepts and skills.
- Pupils have good opportunities to engage in problem solving. These include 'real-life' situations and opportunities to use their knowledge of all aspects of mathematics, including shape, space and measures.
- There are good arrangements to support pupils with learning difficulties. Support staff are well deployed and a variety of intervention programmes is used and adapted to meet pupils' needs.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well as a tool for teaching. Use by pupils, though, is limited and opportunities are missed, for example, to extend their skills in data handling or to make decisions about how to present their work by using ICT.

Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- Rigorous monitoring and analysis of assessment data have pinpointed specific areas for improvement and effective action has been taken to address these. This has led to good provision for the subject and to improvements in pupils' achievement.
- The subject leader is taking a leading role in training, particularly in relation to the implementation of the new primary framework. She is also undertaking activities such as scrutiny of work, interviews with pupils and lesson observations. These are used well to summarise strengths and weaknesses and to identify where there is scope for further improvement.
- Targets set at various levels have proved successful in raising achievement. However, the targets are generally too broad to focus teaching and learning in lessons and are not always appropriate to individual pupils.

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

- Teaching has been improved through a whole-school focus on key areas such as planning for the range of pupils' needs and taking account of different learning styles. This has led to better engagement of pupils and improvements in their progress.
- Lesson observations give clear points for improvement. Individual teachers find these helpful and their comments indicate that they reflect on ways in which they can be addressed. Summaries of key points from monitoring activities are shared with staff. This, together with the provision of in-service training, is also strengthening teaching.

Inclusion

Inclusion in mathematics is good.

- There are very good arrangements to support pupils with short term or specific learning difficulties and promote their access to the full curriculum.
- Pupils with English as an additional language are well integrated and achieve as well as their peers.
- More able pupils are not always challenged to make progress at the rate at which they could.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising the level of challenge for more able pupils to increase the proportion attaining Level 3 at the end of Year 2 and Level 5 at the end of Year 6
- refining the target-setting system so that it better informs teaching and helps pupils to understand exactly what they need to do to improve
- improving the use of ICT to support learning, particularly for pupils who are capable of making decisions about how to organise and present their work.

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