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Ms K Wooder
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Dear Ms Wooder

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 31 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 Year 6 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 given pupils' starting points. Standards are well below average.

- Children start school with limited skills and knowledge. They make steady progress through the Foundation Stage, but only about a half are working securely within the 'Early Learning Goals' by the age of 5.
- Although standards are low throughout the school, pupils are generally making satisfactory progress. In some classes, good teaching is beginning to accelerate pupils' progress. The school's data shows that more pupils are likely to reach the standards expected in national assessments this year at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2. Very few pupils are on track to attain the higher levels.
- Pupils' skills in mental arithmetic have been a focus for the school and are improving. While pupils are developing the ability to use their knowledge of

number to solve everyday problems, they have less experience of tackling more open-ended or investigative tasks, although such opportunities are increasing in some classes. Year 6 pupils showed gaps in their knowledge of geometric shapes and their properties.

- Pupils' behaviour was good. They listened to the teacher and to each other when discussing mathematics with their 'talk partners'. Some take much greater care over the presentation of their written work than others.

Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is satisfactory.

- The quality of teaching was at least satisfactory in the lessons observed; the school has a core of effective practitioners that includes the new subject leader.
- The teaching has a number of strengths. Lessons were well planned. Whole-class starter sessions focused on improving pupils' mental and oral skills or usefully linked to the learning that was to follow. The main element of teaching generally built on earlier learning, and drew on a range of tasks modified for different groups of pupils. Learning objectives were identified and explained. The simple but clever use of labels on which objectives and success criteria are printed provided an efficient means for pupils to check how well they were doing, and saved time otherwise often spent copying them out.
- Teachers asked relevant questions and gave pupils good opportunities to talk with their partners. In the best lessons, teachers capitalised on pupils' responses by asking follow-up questions to probe understanding further or, where an answer exposed a misconception, to help the pupil realise and self-correct his answer. They emphasised the use of correct mathematical language.
- Sometimes, methods became too formulaic so that pupils lost sight of the underpinning mathematics and became confused in trying to apply a 'rule'. Overall, not enough attention is given to ensuring that teaching approaches focus on developing understanding.
- The quality of marking varied; some did not spot errors or misconceptions.
- The school is well staffed with a team of teaching assistants. Most make a significant contribution to lessons by supporting pupils who need extra help or encouragement, particularly those with learning difficulties.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is good.

- The planning for Years 1 to 6 is based on the revised primary framework supported by a variety of practical and other materials. These include 'challenge' activities at different levels within a class, designed to promote using and applying mathematics to extend learning, although pupils' progress in this area is not routinely recorded. Such tasks tend not to be used as a stimulating introduction or unusual approach to a new topic.
- Foundation Stage planning provides an appropriate mix of child-initiated and adult-focus activities. The school is rightly reviewing the nature of provision in the Reception class in preparation for children's transition to Year 1, knowing how significant this step is. It might also consider extending elements of continuous provision into Year 1 to aid this transition, especially for the youngest and lowest attaining children.

- The school's relentless focus on raising standards includes a weekly booster morning on English, mathematics and science for Year 6 pupils. Pupils are clear that this is helping them learn in readiness for national tests in May. Pupils of other ages are identified for additional focused support on specific mathematical topics. They work with trained teaching assistants over a short period of time. Care is taken that pupils' work in other subjects is not repeatedly disrupted.
- All pupils are involved in interesting activities during 'Maths Week'; for example, investigating 'Does the child with the longest legs jump the furthest?'

Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- Your high expectations are well understood by staff and pupils.
- The subject has been very well led since September by the deputy headteacher, formerly an advanced skills teacher, and shadowed by the Year 3 teacher, who takes up the subject leadership in the summer term. Both demonstrate good understanding of the quality of provision and priorities for development. A feature of this effective leadership is good informal partnerships between staff, those who are experienced and the four newly qualified teachers. Capacity for improvement is good.
- The use of assessment data to track pupils' progress is good. Systems for monitoring teaching and learning and the accuracy of teachers' assessments are robust and ensure staff are held to account for the effectiveness of their work.
- The unit for children with autism was not observed during this visit. The local authority's report on the unit was received by the school during the inspection and prompt action to remedy significant weaknesses in provision is planned.

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

The school benefits from the 'Intensifying Support' and 'London Challenge' programmes. The local authority's consultant has provided an effective combination of whole-staff training and support tailored to individual teachers' needs. Performance management places appropriate emphasis on pupils' progress. There is scope to increase the sharing of good practice and to seek pupils' views on their learning in mathematics. Most crucial, though, is the need to improve the emphasis on teaching approaches that focus on developing pupils' conceptual understanding. This has implications for deepening teachers' subject knowledge.

Inclusion

Inclusion in mathematics is satisfactory. There is a good, inclusive ethos in lessons; all pupils are involved in discussion and their responses valued by adults and pupils alike. However, they do not have equal opportunities to use and apply mathematics. Analysis of the 2007 Key Stage 2 results shows some unevenness of achievement. Pupils from economically disadvantaged backgrounds did relatively well, but the youngest pupils in the cohort achieved much less well than their older classmates.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing teachers' expertise in nurturing pupils' conceptual understanding of mathematics
- incorporating more opportunities for all pupils to use and apply their mathematics in lessons, making sure their progression is planned and tracked
- ensuring pupils' experience of learning mathematics in Year 1 builds smoothly on their development in the Foundation Stage
- including pupils' views when evaluating the effectiveness of the school's work in 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

Jane Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector