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Mrs C Wheatley
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Wheatley

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 01 May 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 assessment data and observation of parts of four lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory and standards are above average.

- Children make good progress in the Reception Year and in Years 1 and 2. Standards at the end of Year 2 are above, and sometimes significantly above, average. A high proportion of pupils attain Level 3.
- Progress in Years 3 to 6 is satisfactory overall but not maintained at the same rate as lower down the school. Progress is somewhat erratic, with a 'dip' in Year 5 and pupils picking up again in Year 6. Standards at the end of Year 6 are above average. The school has accurately identified that some more able pupils could be doing better and there is scope to increase the proportion attaining Level 5.
- Year 6 pupils have good understanding of number operations and shape, space and measures. They use what they know to solve word problems but these are

generally 'one step' and do not always challenge pupils to select the most appropriate methods. Pupils are generally confident about the subject and tackle tasks with good application.

Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is satisfactory.

- Lessons are well organised and learning objectives are identified and shared with pupils. However, the content of lessons is not always sharply focused on achieving the stated objectives and this leads to activities that do not extend learning enough.
- In the best lessons, there is a strong focus on exploring pupils' understanding of key concepts and discussing methods for tackling calculations. In other lessons, the focus tends to be more on completing a calculation or correcting errors but not on exploring or eradicating pupils' misconceptions.
- Work is going on to strengthen the use of assessment as a starting point for planning and teaching in order to improve the rate of progress across the school. Much of this is in the early stages but is beginning to have an impact, for example, in 'mental maths' sessions where questions are adapted to give greater challenge for more able pupils.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- Planning is being revised to take account of the new primary framework. Medium term planning is clearly focused on learning intentions and strategies for assessing gains in pupils' learning. This is beginning to support the intended improvements in provision.
- The school has identified the need for a stronger focus on extending pupils' skills in using and applying their knowledge of number. This is beginning to be put into practice and, for example, was a good feature of a lesson where there was a discussion about the range of ways that simple problems might be tackled and how results might be checked.
- Use of information and communication technology (ICT) by pupils is limited. Opportunities are missed to extend work by using ICT in areas such as handling data and calculating using a range of formulae.

Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are satisfactory.

- Developments have been hindered over the past year by significant staffing difficulties which resulted in the subject leader being the acting headteacher for two terms. Staffing is now more stable and there is renewed attention to developing provision for mathematics.
- Analysis of pupils' performance in national and optional tests has been used well to identify key areas for focus to improve pupils' achievement, particularly in using mental methods for fast calculation and applying knowledge in word problems. The school's development plan identifies a range of appropriate activities to strengthen provision.

- Monitoring and evaluation has been limited until recently. Whilst recent evaluation has accurately identified areas for improvement and staff training has focused on these, there has been no follow-up, for example by observing lessons, to check the impact of initiatives.

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

- Limited use has been made of the subject leader's expertise because of the staffing difficulties.
- Staff have undertaken recent training for the new primary framework and planning is being revised to take account of this. A new planning structure is expected to be in place in September.
- The main areas identified to strengthen teaching and learning include developing the use of assessment, reviewing the use of a commercial scheme and extending the focus on using and applying mathematics. This inspection found that all of these are appropriate.

Inclusion

Inclusion in mathematics is satisfactory.

- There is good support for pupils with learning difficulties who often make good progress in relation to their starting points.
- Teaching assistants provide good support for individuals and small groups in lessons, reinforcing teachers' explanations and clarifying how to tackle tasks.
- More able pupils are not always challenged appropriately and their progress slows as a result.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that all pupils, but particularly the more able, make progress at a consistent rate through Years 3 to 6 in order to increase the proportion attaining Level 5 at the end of Key Stage 2
- extending opportunities for problem solving and investigative activities and improving pupils' access to ICT to support work in these areas
- developing strategies to share the most effective practice in teaching and assessment.

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