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Dear Miss Mellody

Ofsted 2008-09 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 15 September 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 three lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement in mathematics is good and standards are above average.

- Small group sizes mean that standards differ greatly year on year, depending upon the particular cohort. Children enter the nursery, and then progress to the reception class with skills and knowledge broadly in line with that expectation..
- Results at the end of Key Stage 1 have been broadly in line with the national average over the last few years. The school's teacher assessments for Key Stage 2 in 2008 show a significant rise in standards, to above average, and these are corroborated by unvalidated results in Key Stage 2 tests. School records show that pupils make good progress in each class and lesson observations during the inspection corroborated this. In the mixed-age classes, the progress of the older pupils is greater than their younger classmates. The very few pupils with learning difficulties make similar good progress to their peers.

- When the school was inspected in June 2007, problem solving and investigation skills were identified as areas of weakness. The school has responded effectively to this so that problem solving and investigations are used very well in many lessons, particularly in Key Stage 2, which has meant that pupils' abilities in these areas are good. This has also supported pupils in improving their understanding of mathematical concepts.
- Pupils said they enjoyed lessons when they were able to discuss their work and that they had many opportunities to work on 'puzzles'.

Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is good.

- Lessons are well planned and challenging for pupils in the mixed-age classes. They start with an appropriate oral activity. This is often used to check pupils' prior knowledge of the work to be covered or their understanding of a topic with which they had problems and which has recently been re-taught. Teachers assess pupils work well by moving around the class to identify errors or misconceptions and use pupils' responses as teaching points.
- Work is well matched to pupils' needs and frequently includes open-ended problems or other investigations. Pupils always respond giving reasons for their answers without being reminded and they said they thought this helped them understand their work. Activities often include slight variations to standard questions, for example asking pupils to identify a wrong number in a sequence when in fact all are correct. Pupils work well in pairs and in Key Stage 2 classes enjoy the 'worker/recorder' sessions. This also improves their mathematical reasoning.
- Lessons conclude with pupils reflecting upon what they have learned, often in relation to the learning objectives.
- Some teachers use the electronic whiteboards well to engage pupils.
- Work in books is marked regularly and pupils say that teachers go over any work they have got wrong, which helps them to improve.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is good.

- The revised primary framework has been introduced into the Key Stage 2 classes and, in response to the school's 2007 inspection, lessons include a wide variety of investigations and problem-solving exercises. Problem solving covers the full extent of the work and not just 'word problems'.
- Some elements of information communication technology (ICT) are covered in lessons but the school recognises this is an area which needs further development to ensure consistency across all classes.
- The school updated schemes of work for nursery and reception children when the classes were amalgamated last year. Children receive a good mixture of directed and child-initiated activities in line with the revised Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum.
- The school evaluated its strategy for key stage test preparation last year and decided to reduce the booster programme and to concentrate on more effective target-setting procedures. This included ensuring pupils had a good understanding of the criteria involved with different levels of work and

assessment procedures. This, along with a greater emphasis on understanding was seen as a major reason for improved results this year.

Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- The subject leader, who took up the role just over a year ago, has had a good impact upon the way in which mathematics is taught and has helped improve achievement. Plans are in place to build upon the improvements made in the upper school and extend expertise across all age groups
- You have been instrumental in supporting the subject leader in improving the quality of teaching so that now achievement is good. Along with the subject leader, you have undertaken lesson observations to identify appropriate areas of teaching and learning to develop and have plans to ensure greater consistency across the school.

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

- The school has been very effective in improving the quality of teaching and learning in Key Stage 2 and has effective plans to build upon this success to improve further the quality in all years.
- Good use has been made of centrally provided courses to support the introduction of the revised framework which has been disseminated across Key Stage 2.
- The local authority identifies the school as a low priority for intervention because it has no concerns about its work in mathematics and hence it has not received direct support from consultants.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring greater opportunities and access to ICT to support pupils' learning in mathematics lessons
- extending the use of good teaching strategies across all groups and hence ensuring greater consistency of best practice within the school.

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

Michael Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector