

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
www.ofsted.gov.uk



09 October 2008

Mrs Z McCormick
Headteacher
Seven Fields Primary School
Leigh Road
Penhill
Swindon
Wiltshire
SN2 5DE

Dear Mrs McCormick

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 07 October 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 seven lessons and sampling provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory. Standards are below average.

- Low standards at the end of Key Stage 2 are proving difficult to shift, despite the school's best efforts over a three-year period. The most recent results show some improvement in the proportion of pupils attaining Level 5 though standards overall remain below average.

- There are secure indications of improvement at the lower end of the school. Children are making good progress in EYFS. At the start of Year 1 in 2008, standards in problem-solving, number and reasoning were broadly average. Skills in calculation, though slightly weaker than other areas, improved on previous years. Key Stage 1 results showed improvement in 2006 and 2007 and were close to average, but this was not sustained in 2008 because of the very high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties in this cohort.
- The rate of progress varies across the school. The best progress is seen in Years 2, 5 and 6. The school has identified that weaknesses in calculating skills are a key factor that limits pupils' achievement and this is currently a particular area of focus.
- Pupils with learning difficulties benefit from well-targeted support and often make good progress over a short period of time. The school has identified concerns in relation to the progress of average attaining pupils, particularly girls, and teaching arrangements have been adjusted to tackle this.
- Pupils interviewed were generally positive about mathematics. They feel they are getting better at number operations but they lack confidence in deciding which operation is most appropriate for a particular problem.

Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is satisfactory.

- While there are examples of good teaching across the school, the quality is variable. Learning objectives are identified for each lesson, but at times these are too generalised to focus specifically on how pupils' skills and understanding should be improved. Teachers make good use of resources, including interactive whiteboards, to demonstrate key teaching points in introductory sessions. However, they do not always use strategies to ensure that all pupils are involved in thinking about the concepts introduced and therefore miss opportunities to check their understanding.
- Teachers are very aware of the wide range of abilities in their classes and modify tasks to try to take account of this. However, there is sometimes a lack of challenge for more able pupils, particularly in whole class introductory sessions. Work set is too difficult at times for those who struggle to work out answers or find recording difficult.
- Pupils' progress is systematically tracked and the information is being used well to provide extra support for those that are underachieving. Targets are set for pupils but they lack understanding of precisely what the targets mean, saying, for example, that they are 'working on their tables'. Marking rarely refers to targets, although teachers' comments sometimes give very clear guidance on pupils need to do to improve. This is not consistent practice across the school.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- Adjustments are being made to planning to strengthen provision for teaching calculation skills. The school has developed clear guidance for this with specific examples that are useful for teachers in each year group.

- There are some good opportunities for pupils to use and apply their mathematical knowledge in cross-curricular projects and in solving problems. However, there is no structured approach for the systematic development of pupils' skills in using and applying mathematics across the school.

Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are satisfactory.

- The rate of improvement has been affected by high staff turnover and prolonged absences, including that of the previous subject leader. This has meant that the impact of a range of initiatives to improve pupils' achievement has been limited.
- Senior managers make good use of data in termly reviews to identify where pupils are not on track to make expected gains. This information is discussed with individual teachers. Teaching arrangements have been adjusted to give extra support to inexperienced teachers or where there are concerns about pupils' progress.
- There is a comprehensive action plan for this academic year that gives a clear steer to strengthening the identified areas for improvement. Success criteria for each action point are specific, clear and measurable.

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

- There are good arrangements for the professional development of staff, including specific training on aspects such as developing pupils' skills in mental mathematics as well as coaching and mentoring for individual teachers.
- Analysis of pupils' performance in national tests has accurately identified areas for improvement. Further training is planned for this year, supported by the development of resources, to improve the teaching of these areas.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring a more consistent rate of progress through the school that builds on the good start that children are making in EYFS
- strengthening the teaching of methods of calculation and extending opportunities for pupils to explore ways in which these might be used
- ensuring that pupils are clear about their targets and know what they need to do to achieve them, and that marking gives clear feedback on the next steps in learning.

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