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Mrs H Galvin
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Dear Mrs Galvin

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 01 December 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 six lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory and standards are broadly average.

- Overall, on entry, children's mathematical development and communication skills are lower than are typical for children of similar age. Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage. Teachers and other adults create well thought out opportunities for children to learn and to reason things out for themselves using simple mathematical language.
- Standards in Year 2 are below average. This reflects the relatively high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and pupils who join the school for short periods of time. These pupils achieve well, meeting

expectations based on their prior attainment, because of the good support they receive. Other pupils achieve satisfactorily but could do better if challenged more.

- Pupils achieve satisfactorily overall by the age of 11. Standards are broadly average in Year 6. Pupils' results in national tests in 2008 improved significantly, reversing the downward trend of previous years. The improvement is due to a concerted effort in the last 18 months to detect and rectify weaknesses that had accumulated over time. The improvement is being sustained, as was evident in the lessons observed and from records of pupils' progress.

Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is satisfactory.

- Oral work is carefully planned. Teachers manage class discussion well. They follow up pupils' answers and introduce alternative approaches to clarify understanding when pupils are unsure. The tasks set for independent work are not always challenging enough for middle ability and more able pupils in Key Stage 1.
- The systems for assessing pupils' progress are improving steadily. Their impact is a contributory factor to the better results in national tests in Year 6 in 2008. The school acknowledges the need to develop the systems further so as to identify and remedy underachievement more quickly during the year.
- Classwork and homework are marked thoroughly, providing pupils with meaningful comments about how to improve.
- Teaching assistants work closely with teachers to provide effective support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for those who have personal problems that affect their learning.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- Schemes of work are flexible. They take good account of national initiatives. The curriculum in the Foundation Stage is very effective; it is structured well around play and practical activities.
- The school does not have a strategic plan for integrating mathematics into cross-curricular work. Some good examples were observed of pupils using and applying mathematics in different contexts, but, overall, planning for investigative work and problem solving is inconsistent.
- New topics are introduced through discussion about specific problems to which pupils can relate. This works well, for example, in Year 6, pupils were better able to come to logical conclusions when comparing graphs about crime because they linked their findings to previous discussions with the police about citizenship.

Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are satisfactory.

- Senior managers led and managed the subject satisfactorily during an extensive period of instability and long term absences in the leadership of the subject. The priority given to improving standards in Key Stage 2 was appropriate because it led to identification of weaknesses in pupils' learning and action to remedy them.

- This term, the subject leader has completed a comprehensive review of the provision. Critical evaluation of pupils' progress is highlighting aspects of learning that need attention. Currently, the whole-school focus is on improving pupils' understanding of number concepts and their application in calculations.
- The school has an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses in the subject and is now in a good position to establish a coherent cycle for further improvement.

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

- Last year, the school's response to improving teaching and learning focused mainly on Key Stage 2 where significant gaps had been identified in pupils' basic knowledge and understanding of mathematical concepts. Training for teachers and additional support for targeted pupils were effective in raising standards across the key stage, particularly in Year 6. This year, strategic planning and better use of information from assessment are sharpening teachers' practices.
- There is scope for professional development in planning for greater challenge in pupils' independent learning in Key Stage 1.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards in Key Stage 1 by providing more challenge in lessons for middle ability and more able pupils
- making pertinent use of information from assessment procedures throughout the year so that underachievement is remedied before it translates to difficulties that constrain pupils' subsequent 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

June Tracey
Additional Inspector