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Mr P Brandreth  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Brandreth

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 1 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 parts of seven lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory. Standards are below average.

- A current priority for the school is to raise standards, which have been well below average at the end of Key Stage 2. Until recently, progress through Years 3 to 6 has been erratic and overall unsatisfactory. Extra support is being provided in those year groups where pupils have not been making the gains that they should and this is leading to a more consistent rate of progress. The picture is more secure at Key Stage 1 where pupils make satisfactory progress from starting points that are generally below expectations.
- Observations during this inspection show that pupils are often not secure on key number facts such as multiplication tables and number bonds. Pupils find difficulty in selecting appropriate ways to tackle problems and are not methodical in their ways of working. The school has identified weaknesses in pupils' ability in

using and applying mathematics and the curriculum is being adapted to focus more on this aspect of the subject.

- Good use is being made of tracking systems to identify those pupils who are underachieving. Class teachers are made aware of these target groups and are given clear information, based on a rigorous analysis of pupils' performance in tests, of where there are gaps in pupils' understanding.
- Pupils have mixed views about the subject and often lack confidence in their mathematical skills. However, Year 6 pupils feel that work is more interesting this year. They are confident about stating where they are having difficulties and they appreciate getting extra help.

## Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Lessons are generally well structured with an oral or mental starter session, a main activity focused on particular aspects of mathematics and a review session. Key mathematical vocabulary is identified in planning and displayed in classrooms or on interactive whiteboards. Teachers generally use relevant vocabulary in whole-class sessions, but do not always explain what it means. Opportunities are missed to encourage pupils to use subject-specific vocabulary to explain their ideas and consolidate their understanding.
- Pupils' grasp of particular aspects of mathematics is regularly assessed and this gives useful information on areas that need to be re-visited. A good example of this was observed in a lesson where a teacher revised work on calculating fractions of whole numbers. This was because, in a previous lesson, she had identified that a significant number of pupils lacked understanding of the method to use.
- Opportunities to assess pupils' understanding in introductory sessions to lessons are being missed. Not enough use is made of resources, such as individual whiteboards or number fans, to ensure that all pupils are engaged in calculating answers and to enable the teacher to check any misconceptions.
- Pupils have individual targets but are not always sure what these are or what they have to do to achieve them. Targets are not always worded in child-friendly language and this compounds the difficulty for pupils in understanding the relevance of their targets.

## Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- The introduction of the new framework is ensuring greater consistency in provision across the school. A good range of support materials is being used, including a calculations policy and guidance from the local authority (LA) on effective teaching in using and applying mathematics.
- Planning shows that teachers consider the different abilities within a class and provide a range of tasks in the main session that takes account of pupils' varying levels of understanding. Pupils with learning difficulties benefit from extra support from teachers or teaching assistants. A current focus for the school is to strengthen provision for gifted and more able pupils to ensure that they are appropriately challenged in all lessons.

- Good use is being made of information and communication technology (ICT) to boost the skills of Year 6 pupils through personalised programs that give practice in those aspects of number where there are weaknesses. However, more generally, ICT is under-used, for example, to support work on data-handling.

## Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are satisfactory.

- Much of the recent work to strengthen provision for the subject has been led and supported by the LA in view of the concern about standards. The two subject leaders have formulated a detailed action plan based on key findings from a range of monitoring and evaluation activities. This is rightly focused on raising expectations of pupils' potential to achieve; embedding the use of assessment to inform planning and teaching; and boosting progress for underachieving pupils.
- The senior management team and subject leaders are contributing to improvement in a range of ways. A significant amount of support is being given in view of the high turnover of staff with several teachers being new and/or inexperienced. Staff are given clear feedback following monitoring activities and planning is being supported through work in phase teams. Data is used well to track pupils' progress, followed by discussion with individual teachers about those who are at risk of underachieving.

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

- The school has made good use of support from the LA to try to improve teaching and learning. There has been a significant impact as a result of training for the new framework and, more recently, for the implementation of the strategy for assessing pupils' progress in year groups across the school.
- Training needs are identified through monitoring activities and performance management. The school has recognised weaknesses in subject knowledge for some teachers and, where appropriate, this has been an area of focus. The LA's adviser and advanced skills teachers have provided support for individual teachers and led in-service training for all staff. Unfortunately the impact has been diminished to some extent by the high turnover of staff.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- extending the use of subject-specific vocabulary, making sure that teachers explain what terms mean, put them into context to demonstrate how they should be used, and encourage pupils to use these in discussion and when responding to questions
- finding ways to engage all pupils in introductory parts of lessons so that teachers can assess the extent of their understanding and quickly address any misconceptions or introduce greater challenge as appropriate
- ensuring that all pupils understand their targets and are clear about what they need to do to achieve them.

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