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Dear Ms Evans

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 12 January 2009 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 or sampling of four 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.

- Children get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and, by the end of the Reception Year, almost all exceed the standards expected. Children achieve particularly well in calculation, an area that is often weak when they start school.
- A range of initiatives implemented over the past two years has ensured that this good start is now successfully built on. A rigorous system to track pupils' progress has been introduced and regular progress review meetings check whether pupils are on track to attain ambitious targets at the end of Year 6.
- Cohorts are very small but the trend over a three-year period shows an improvement in standards at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2. In particular, there

is now a sharp focus on ensuring that more able pupils reach the higher levels in national tests.

- Pupils are generally enthusiastic about mathematics. Year 6 pupils enjoy a range of open-ended activities such as number challenges. They are positive about opportunities to work collaboratively and the flexibility in grouping arrangements that means that pupils of different abilities sometimes have an opportunity to work together.

Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is good.

- Teaching methods have been reviewed and adapted as part of the drive to improve standards. All groups now have regular focused input led in turn by a teacher or teaching assistant. This ensures that more able pupils are challenged in their thinking. Those pupils with learning difficulties continue to get appropriate support, but also have the chance to work independently.
- The most effective lessons are clearly based on assessment of pupils' prior learning. Teachers use a range of targeted questions to check individual pupils' understanding or revisit key teaching points to consolidate their knowledge. There are occasions in other lessons where teaching tends to be focused on completing a task rather than securing pupils' understanding.
- A new marking scheme makes effective use of symbols to record how successfully pupils have tackled a task. Pupils have a good understanding of what the symbols mean and, occasionally, older pupils assess their own work using these. Sometimes the marked work has useful comments to indicate the next stage in learning, but there is scope to extend this further as pupils generally lack awareness of what they need to do to improve.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is good.

- Planning, based on the new primary framework, is adapted to take account of mixed-age classes and the range of pupils' abilities. Work is being undertaken to sharpen learning objectives so that these are clearly focused on improving pupils' understanding.
- In the EYFS, a broad range of relevant, first-hand experiences ensures that children develop a good understanding of number and early aspects of calculation.
- Good use has been made of analysis to identify areas of mathematics that need a sharper focus. This has led to stronger emphasis on improving pupils' competence in aspects of calculation, particularly to strengthen their knowledge of multiplication. The school has also worked to increase opportunities for pupils to use and apply their knowledge of mathematics. In Years 5 and 6 in particular, there are good examples of practical activities that encourage pupils to solve a variety of problems.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used for a various practice tasks, largely related to use of number for calculations. However, there is very limited use of ICT for data-handling and pupils have little understanding of spreadsheets.

Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- Your strong partnership with the subject leader ensures that mathematics has a high profile and that all teachers are aware that they have a role to play in raising standards. The introduction of a tracking system has proved particularly successful in monitoring standards, providing teachers with clear information on pupils' attainment and raising expectations of what pupils might achieve.
- Good use is made of analysis of pupils' performance in tests to identify areas that might be improved. This informs action planning for individual classes as well as the school development plan.
- The school has a strong track record in terms of ensuring good support for pupils with learning difficulties. More recently, there has been an increased focus on identifying gifted and talented pupils and on improving provision for pupils in each year group who have the potential to make accelerated progress. Use is being made of assessment information to develop personalised learning plans; this work is at an early stage but has the potential to improve achievement still further.

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

- Participation in the local authority's leading learning programme and school-based training on the introduction of the new primary framework have proved successful in improving the overall quality of teaching and learning.
- You have successfully promoted a collaborative approach to securing improvements. This has been achieved through open discussion on standards and progress and encouraging staff to adapt teaching methods to meet the needs of pupils better.
- The expertise of the subject leader is used well in leading developments in mathematics, but there is no opportunity for colleagues to observe her teaching. Much of the monitoring of teaching is on an informal basis. While this is helpful in gaining an overview of quality, it does not enable a focused evaluation of key areas identified for improvement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that pupils are clear about the next steps in their learning and what they need to do to improve
- extending the use of ICT so that pupils have opportunities to explore its potential in areas such as organising and interrogating data and using formulae for calculations
- increasing opportunities to share effective practice and to evaluate the impact of strategies to improve teaching.

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