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Mr P Barnes
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Dear Mr Barnes

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 3 February 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 of two lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory and standards are average.

- Children make a good start in the Foundation Stage. Their attainment is below that expected for their age when they enter Nursery. They make good progress. By the end of the Reception year, attainment has improved and is broadly in line with that expected for children aged five years.
- Pupils' achievement is satisfactory in Key Stage 1 and improving. Attainment has gradually risen over recent years. By the end of Year 2, standards are average.
- Pupils make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 2. Attainment had been falling but began to rise in 2007 and the improvement was sustained in 2008. By the end of Year 6, standards are average.

- Pupils' calculation skills are developing well but they experience some difficulties in using and applying their knowledge and skills to solve mathematical problems.
- Groups of pupils, such as boys, girls, pupils with learning or language difficulties and those from different ethnic backgrounds, progress at very similar rates. The improving achievement of more able pupils is evident in the increasing numbers of Year 6 pupils achieving Level 5.
- Pupils have good attitudes to mathematics. They listen carefully, concentrate well and persevere when the task is challenging. Their enjoyment of mathematics noticeably increases when they are involved in investigating and mathematical problem solving.

Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is satisfactory.

- Many pupils are still in the process of learning English and teachers are very successful in developing pupils' understanding of mathematical language.
- Activities are well matched to pupils' different learning requirements and teaching them in small groups makes it easier to cater for their diverse learning needs.
- Mental starter sessions encourage pupils to think quickly and calculate accurately. Effective use of games and mathematical apparatus helps them to visualise mathematical ideas.
- Targets are set to help pupils to know what to aim for but, when marking their work, teachers sometimes omit to provide pointers for improvement.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is variable. Pupils' conceptual understanding is more effectively developed in some lessons than others.
- Assessment is used very effectively to measure what pupils have learnt over a period of time. However, assessment is not used sufficiently in some lessons to pinpoint and correct pupils' misconceptions. Where teaching is most successful, pupils are asked to hold up their answers on mini-whiteboards. This enables the teacher to know when to pause the lesson to reinforce understanding or move on swiftly when understanding is secure.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- Children in the Foundation Stage have good opportunities to learn mathematics through structured play, indoors and outside.
- Pupils have good access to information and communication technology (ICT) which increases their understanding and enjoyment of mathematics.
- The curriculum is thoughtfully adapted to meet the needs of pupils who require language support or who find learning difficult. The level of challenge is being raised to cater for the needs of more able pupils.
- Pupils' calculation skills are built upon effectively because teachers follow very clear guidance on how they should be taught. However, pupils' skills in problem solving and using and applying mathematics are not developed as smoothly.

Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are satisfactory.

- Leaders' monitoring and evaluation of the work in pupils' books and assessments of their learning are accurate, placing the school in a strong position to eliminate inconsistencies and drive through improvements in pupils' progress.
- Lessons are observed to check the quality of teaching. However, they do not always focus sufficiently on the extent to which teaching increases pupils' conceptual understanding.

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

- With the implementation of the revised strategy, training has increased and more attention is being focussed on teaching and learning and setting meaningful targets to help pupils to improve.
- There are good examples of staff working alongside others to share perceptions and develop teachers' subject knowledge. However, the high turnover of staff over recent years has made it more difficult to maintain and build upon expertise.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving pupils' capacity to use and apply their knowledge and skills to raise achievement further
- making greater use of assessment within lessons to identify pupils' misconceptions and develop their conceptual understanding
- ensuring that when pupils' work is marked, pointers for improvement are consistently given.

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

Colin Smith
Additional Inspector