

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



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Mr I Gordo
Headteacher
Bedonwell Junior School
Bedonwell Road
Belvedere
Kent
DA17 5PF

Dear Mr Gordo

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 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 yourself 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 and standards are average.

- Standards fell in 2007 to just below average levels, having previously been consistently above average. They rallied somewhat in 2008 to slightly above average levels. The school has set very challenging targets for 2009.
- Pupils' progress is satisfactory in Years 3 and 4 and then accelerates in Years 5 and 6. The school is still relying on 'catch-up' programmes to overcome past underachievement but is gradually eliminating the weaknesses in teaching and the curriculum that brought this about.
- Records show that more able pupils make much faster progress than those who are less able. The school is moving away from teaching pupils in ability sets as

this was having a negative impact on teachers' expectations of less able pupils and on the pupils' own self-esteem and enjoyment.

- Pupils say they enjoy mathematics lessons most when they are exciting, with plenty of practical activities, and least when they 'just have to work in books'. Several said the exciting lessons don't happen often enough.

Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is satisfactory.

- Good teaching in Years 5 and 6 helps to accelerate pupils' progress, and in some cases, to make up lost ground. Teaching is satisfactory in Years 3 and 4, although there is also some good practice.
- The use of assessment information when planning activities is sharper in some classes than others. As a result, some lessons do not build well enough on pupils' widely differing starting points.
- In the good lessons, learning moves on at a brisk pace and the activities planned for different groups are suitably varied and challenging.
- Most teachers use an effective combination of visual, auditory and practical tasks to meet pupils' differing needs, although there are too few opportunities for pupils to use computers to support their learning.
- One of the main differences between the good and satisfactory lessons is the way teachers develop pupils' reasoning skills. Sometimes there is more emphasis on acquiring knowledge than on developing mathematical understanding.
- Marking does not show pupils clearly enough what they need to do to improve their work.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- The school has embraced the renewed national framework and teachers plan effectively to incorporate using and applying mathematics into each unit of work.
- The school has identified the need to focus more closely on written calculations and mathematical explanations which are relatively weaker aspects of the curriculum.
- In order to boost pupils' enjoyment, the school has acknowledged the need for greater creativity in the curriculum, particularly through cross-curricular approaches.
- The school provides good additional support for gifted mathematicians. They receive regular specialist tuition in higher level skills and were proud to explain that were 'doing Level 6 work and probably Level 7 soon'.
- Less able pupils and those with learning difficulties have not been supported as well in mathematics as in reading and writing. The school is now taking action to redress the balance.

Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are satisfactory.

- You have recently taken on the leadership of the subject, pending the appointment of a new post-holder. Having previously taken prompt action to

address identified weaknesses in teaching and the curriculum, you have ensured that all teachers now have performance targets to meet that relate specifically to the progress their pupils make.

- Regular reviews of each pupil's progress with class teachers enable senior leaders to maintain a clear overview and to spot early signs of underachievement. This stronger focus on tracking pupils' progress is helping to move them on at a faster pace.
- The subject action plan has a principal focus on raising standards but does not contain measurable criteria by which to evaluate the impact of improvement strategies.
- Monitoring of lessons and pupils' work has not always been rigorous enough in evaluating the quality of learning or the progress pupils make. There is still insufficient emphasis on analysing the impact of teaching on learning.

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

- Training courses are well planned to address the school's identified needs. For example, teachers received input from a mathematics specialist on developing creative approaches in mixed-ability classes, with a particular focus on less able pupils.
- Provision for using and applying mathematics has improved as a result of training for all staff.
- The school is receiving good support from external consultants through its participation in a project to close the attainment gap between mathematics and English.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- accelerating pupils' progress in Years 3 and 4, especially those who are less able, through consistently good quality teaching that develops pupils' reasoning skills and mathematical understanding
- developing greater creativity in the curriculum in order to increase pupils' enjoyment and boost their achievement
- increasing the momentum of improvement through rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the quality of 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

Carole Skinner
Additional Inspector