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Dear Miss Marshall

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 2 March 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 learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation 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 broadly average.

- The school incorporates an integrated resource unit that provides for children with multiple learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Overall, children's mathematical development on entry is lower than is typical for children aged 3 to 4 years but it fluctuates considerably from year to year. Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They grow in confidence and independence because highly trained staff monitor and move learning on step by step at a pace appropriate to each child's stage of development.

- Standards are slightly below average in Year 2 and broadly average in Year 6, as is reflected in the school's assessments and national tests. This represents good achievement bearing in mind the very wide range of abilities in each of the five mixed-age classes.
- Provision focuses sharply on pupils' meaningful understanding of number concepts and the development of skills in calculation. This is providing a good platform for learning and raises pupils' confidence when tackling problem-solving exercises.

Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is good.

- Teachers have high expectations that are conveyed to pupils. A good balance is struck between challenge and encouragement. Pupils respond well to praise and to the help they receive when they are unsure about how to proceed. Consequently, pupils grow in confidence and are quick to seek support when it is needed.
- Much of the teaching is heavily dependent on oral work. Teachers are patient in questioning and seeking explanations from pupils. This reinforces for pupils the importance of logical thinking and provides teachers with information about pupils' ability to transfer mathematical skills across all aspects of the work.
- A contributory factor to pupils' good progress is the use of strategies that enable every pupil to experience a measure of success, however small, in every lesson.
- The recent introduction of individual target cards for mathematics is engaging pupils well in their own learning and stimulating healthy ambition and competition between them.
- Systems for tracking pupils' progress have been refined over the last two years. They are effective in influencing the planning for lessons and in identifying where there is capacity for further improvement.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is flexible and thoughtfully designed. Provision for pupils with specific learning needs, some very complex, is seamlessly woven into that for other pupils in each mixed-age class. Consequently, pupils of all abilities learn to work well together and are challenged at their full potential.
- Pupils are grouped by ability rather than age in all classes. The teachers use the flexibility of this arrangement well to facilitate movement between groups, within lessons, according to pupils' level of understanding in the topic being studied. In every lesson observed, opportunities were provided for pupils to work independently and to apply mathematics in practical situations.
- Pupils on the school council recently conducted a survey of their peers' views of mathematics. Pupils said that they enjoyed mathematics lessons because 'they did interesting things that would help them get jobs later on'. They valued the fact that their teachers knew just what they could and could not do and explained to them individually what to do next.
- Good opportunities are provided, on a regular basis, for pupils to use technology to advance their learning in mathematics.

- Mathematics is integral to cross-curricular work and to whole-school activities. A typical example is the school's involvement in World Maths Day when, amongst other activities, pupils of all ages and abilities have the opportunity to compete with pupils from many nations.

Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- Leadership and management are proactive and innovative, providing challenge for teachers and pupils alike.
- Self-evaluation is critical and productive. It triggers response when weaknesses are identified and brings about improvement. Currently, for example, the use of the assessment system is being extended to broaden teachers' awareness of the impact of pupils' progress in any one year on their long-term progress.

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

- The school reacts quickly yet selectively to initiatives that it considers can influence achievement and learning. It engages teachers, as individuals and as a whole team, in evaluating the impact of current practices and teasing out what works best in the school's current circumstances. This has led, for example, to teaching strategies that make good use of problem-solving exercises relevant to pupils' experiences in everyday life.
- The training and deployment of teaching assistants are significant factors in the very good provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Teaching assistants are fully involved in the planning and preparation of lessons. They know pupils well so are able to set challenges at just the right level to boost independence without undermining confidence.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising further the overall attainment of pupils in Year 2
- heightening classteachers' awareness of how the progress of pupils in their class contributes to the consistency of progress in mathematics across the whole school.

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