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Mrs P O'Brien  
Headteacher  
English Martyrs Catholic Primary School  
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Dear Mrs O'Brien

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 18 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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of two lessons and four parts of lessons.

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

#### Achievement and standards

Achievement in mathematics is outstanding and standards are exceptionally high.

- According to the school's records, children enter the nursery with mathematical development below that expected for their age. Their calculation skills are particularly weak. Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. By the end of Reception, their attainment in number and shape is broadly in line with that expected for their age. Their calculation skills have improved but are still below those expected for children aged five years.
- Pupils achieve well in Key Stage 1 and by the end of Year 2, standards are above average. There has been a rising trend in recent years.

- Pupils' achievement in Key Stage 2 is outstanding. By the end of Year 6, standards have been exceptionally high for the past four years.
- Pupils' achievement and standards in calculation, shape, space and measures, and data handling are equally high. Their achievement in using and applying mathematics, investigating and solving problems is good but not quite as high as in other areas. The school is working successfully to close this gap.
- High quality additional activities, such as cross-curricular mathematics topics and homework assignments, support groups and parental involvement, make a vital contribution to pupils' high achievement.
- The achievement of boys, girls, gifted and talented pupils and those who require additional support is equally good because their diverse needs are fully met.
- Pupils display excellent attitudes to learning and enjoy mathematics immensely. They relish challenges and work diligently, both independently and collaboratively, on mathematical assignments.

### Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is good with outstanding features.

- Excellent use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) to help pupils to understand complex ideas, improve their skills and solve problems.
- Teachers use mathematical equipment imaginatively and provide stimulating activities that are very well matched to pupils' different learning needs. These approaches ignite pupils' enthusiasm and promote high achievement.
- Teachers use assessments very effectively to identify pupils' learning needs and set challenging and meaningful targets to help them to achieve their goals. Although errors in pupils' work are identified and corrected, pointers for improvement are sometimes omitted when their work is marked.
- Teachers are effective in developing pupils' conceptual understanding by providing first-hand learning experiences and anticipating likely misconceptions. Just occasionally, as the lesson progresses, opportunities are missed to check pupils' understanding to ensure that they are fully prepared for the next activity.

### Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is outstanding.

- The school has now designed a highly effective curriculum, which fully reflects pupils' needs and interests and includes all of the components of the revised framework. As a result, pupils have excellent opportunities to develop calculation, investigation and problem-solving skills in real-life contexts.
- The use of ICT as a tool for learning mathematics is extremely well established.
- Curriculum planning is dynamic. Topics are carefully evaluated and modified in the light of pupils' enjoyment, confidence and success in learning.
- The needs of pupils of high ability, those who require additional support and pupils whose performance has faltered are particularly well catered for through intervention and personalised learning programmes.

### Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are outstanding.

- Your contribution as headteacher has been significant in setting high expectations of pupils and staff, raising achievement and ensuring that pupils' learning of mathematics is meaningful, purposeful and enjoyable.
- The subject leader's deep knowledge of mathematics and attention to detail in working with staff to evaluate what works and where improvements could be made, has ensured that high standards have been maintained.
- Checking of the work of the school is meticulous and rigorous. The information is used very effectively in future planning. The process constantly refreshes teachers' and pupils' enthusiasm for the subject.
- Analysing assessments and tracking pupils' progress are highly effective tools for improvement. The school's data indicated that standards in Years 2 and 6 would not be as high in 2009 as in previous years because of the higher incidence of pupils with learning difficulties. In response, much additional support is being provided for particular pupils, and with some success. The school has already adjusted its targets to reflect the improved attainment.

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

- The school possesses considerable expertise in mathematics and ICT. This is systematically and regularly shared to promote good practice.
- Staff training is highly effective because those who provide it work in school and are able to measure its impact.
- The school has designed a useful proforma for observing lessons but there is scope to increase the focus on how well teachers evaluate and promote pupils' conceptual understanding.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- teachers adding pointers for improvement when they mark pupils' work
- ensuring that pupils' understanding is checked as the lesson unfolds to ensure that they are fully prepared for the follow-up activities.

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