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Dear Mr Holland

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 31 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 eight lessons or part 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.

- Pupils enter the school at the start of Year 6 with standards which are just below average. Key Stage 2 test results show that standards are broadly average with pupils having made less than expected progress from Key Stage 1.
- Across Years 7 and 8 pupils make good progress and leave at the end of Year 8 with standards above average. Lower attaining pupils, who were identified as underachieving at the time of the school's last inspection, now make good progress. Although standards are above average overall the proportion of pupils gaining the highest levels is slightly below average.

- Pupils have very positive attitudes towards mathematics and enjoy lessons, especially those which involve practical work. Behaviour observed was always good.
- Pupils know their targets and also what they need to do to attain them. The school's system for tracking pupils' progress is effective in identifying how well pupils are achieving. Staff intervene quickly if any are falling behind. The system is also very good at gauging the achievement of pupils at the untypical time of transfer to high school at the end of Year 8.

Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is good.

- Lessons are engaging and build upon good relationships between staff and pupils. This is especially evident when staff draw on their expertise of other areas of the curriculum; for example, using orienteering to develop angles and bearings and 3D realisation in isometric projections and scale drawings. This often gives work greater relevance.
- Pupils work well in lessons and enjoy the variety of activities, especially when these include practical work or opportunities to work together.
- Teachers often use questions effectively to identify pupils' misconceptions and then ensure problems are overcome through using responses to identify teaching points. However, at other times, questions are closed in nature and do not encourage pupils to give reasons for their answers. This means that pupils do not readily give full responses that develop their reasoning skills.
- Effective use is made of electronic whiteboards but the range of applications used is limited and does not always include more dynamic images.
- Assessment is well directed with good use of objectives, linked to pupils' targets. Marking is good: books are marked thoroughly and frequently, errors in pupils' work are identified, and good support on how to rectify these, as well as suitable encouragement, is given.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is good.

- Good schemes of work promote good quality lessons. Appropriate activities are identified within schemes on how best to teach a particular topic. The school's involvement in piloting and delivering materials from the Assessing Pupils Progress (APP) initiative has meant that there has been an increase in activities which involve pupils investigating mathematics and discovering concepts for themselves.
- The 'collapsed' days which allow pupils to develop an area of work across a longer time period have been well received. Pupils commented that it was nice to see how mathematics fitted into other areas of the curriculum and into the world of work and commerce.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well in some lessons by the use of electronic whiteboards but these activities often miss opportunities to use the dynamic nature of the resource. Pupils have inconsistent opportunities to develop their mathematical skills by using ICT themselves.

Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- The subject is very well led. The subject leader works well with all members of staff and has brought about significant improvements to the quality of work in mathematics across the school. Other staff lead on particular areas of development, providing effective leadership across different aspects of mathematics.
- You and the subject leader have a good overview of strengths and areas for development, and these are appropriately linked to the whole-school improvement plan. This process has included gaining the views of pupils who are able to influence the way in which they are taught.
- Regular meetings to discuss and develop teaching activities mean that staff share good ideas and resources.
- Well received support has been given to parents of Year 6 pupils as their children prepare for the Key Stage 2 tests.

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

- The strong collegiate approach of staff within the school has meant that they support each other in developing appropriate activities to engage and enthuse pupils.
- Appropriate continuing professional development opportunities have been used to update all staff on mathematical issues and to roll out the APP methodology.
- Good support has been given by the local authority consultant and through their in-service training courses.
- As part of whole-school improvement, you have ensured that mathematics, like other subjects, continually evolves so that expertise is shared and improvements to the quality of provision bring about higher standards.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing the proportion of pupils who gain the highest levels
- improving pupils' reasoning skills by ensuring questions are more open and encouraging pupils to give reasons with their answers
- increasing opportunities for pupils to develop their mathematical skills by using ICT and enhancing the range of applications used in lessons on the electronic whiteboards to include more dynamic applications.

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 local Learning and Skills Council and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Michael Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector