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Ms J Mounter Headteacher St Aldhelm's CE Primary School Chelynch Park Shepton Mallet BA4 4PL

Dear Ms Mounter

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 8 June 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 parts of six 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.

- Significant underachievement, particularly in Years 3 to 6, has been tackled successfully so that the majority pupils are now making at least satisfactory progress through the school. In many instances, pupils are making up lost ground at a good rate. This is the result of rigorous checks on their progress and the setting of clear targets for their attainment at the end of each year.
- There are indications of improvements in standards, particularly at the lower end of the school. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good gains given their limited skills on entry, particularly in their understanding of number. As a result, the vast majority are attaining standards at least in line with expectations. This is being successfully built on in Years 1 and 2: standards at the end of Year 2 are rising.

• Pupils generally enjoy mathematics and are keen to succeed. Year 6 pupils agreed that they have 'made a big leap this year'. They are more confident about the subject, feel that teaching is generally pitched at the right level and are aware of their targets for improvement. Pupils show good understanding of gaps in their learning, citing, for example, a need to get to be more methodical when tackling problems or getting quicker at recall of their tables in order to improve their skills in multiplication and addition. Those who have had extra help are very positive about the way that this has improved their understanding.

Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is satisfactory.

- Weaknesses in teaching have been eradicated so that lessons are now at least satisfactory. The most successful lessons are conducted at a good pace and involve all pupils in thinking, sharing ideas and responding to the teacher's questions right from the start. In other lessons, responses in the introductory parts of lessons tend to be sought on an individual basis. Teachers miss opportunities to use resources such as individual whiteboards or number fans for all pupils to show their answers. It is therefore difficult for teachers to assess the understanding of all pupils and address any misconceptions or demonstrate methods of calculation for those who are unsure of which strategies to use.
- Planning has been strengthened so that group tasks take account of the range of abilities in the class. Teaching assistants are well used to support pupils with learning difficulties or those who have gaps in their understanding either in class or in withdrawal groups. Work is generally pitched at the right level for average attainers, many of whom were underachieving in the past. There is still a need to raise the level of challenge for more able pupils and to extend the strategies, seen in some lessons, which ensure that they have opportunities to use and apply their good understanding of mathematics in all parts of the lesson.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- There has been helpful training on the use of the new primary framework and this is used as the basis of planning throughout the school. Monitoring has accurately identified that planning is not always adapted to suit the wide-ranging needs of each class and this is currently a focus for development.
- Good attention has been paid to broadening the curriculum to enable a greater focus on using and applying mathematics. There are good examples of pupils using mathematics for real purposes, for example, in comparing the amount of waste generated by each year group at lunchtime as part of an eco-initiative. The forthcoming trip to Germany for Year 6 pupils is being used to compare exchange rates for euros in order to identify the best provider to use when the currency is purchased.
- Planning and 'working walls' highlight key mathematical vocabulary and demonstrate a range of strategies for calculation and solving a variety of problems. Interactive whiteboards are used well in lessons to demonstrate key teaching points but the use of information and communication technology (ICT) by pupils is limited. Opportunities are missed to extend learning, particularly for

older and more able pupils, for example, in open-ended investigations, interrogating data and using formulae in simulations.

Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- When you took up post in January 2008, your very thorough analysis identified the extent of pupils' underachievement and resulted in swift action. Strategies to improve the quality of provision have had a positive impact. Teaching has improved and there is greater consistency in planning. Regular reviews of pupils' progress are enabling thorough analysis of the proportion making gains at expected rates and allow identification of those who need specific support with aspects of their learning. As a result, standards are beginning to rise and pupils' achievement is now satisfactory.
- Although current arrangements for subject leadership are temporary, there is still a sharp focus on further strengthening provision. Analysis of pupils' performance in standardised tests and an audit of staff skills have informed arrangements for in-service training in areas such as problem solving and assessing pupils' progress in mathematics. A range of monitoring activities, including lesson observations and scrutiny of planning and pupils' work, highlight what is going well and areas that need further development.

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

- Support from the local authority has been well used to improve teachers' knowledge of mathematics and their confidence in teaching it. Intensive inservice training has been tailored to the needs of the school and has proved effective in improving the overall quality of teaching and learning.
- Regular observations of lessons, feedback to individual teachers, follow up of areas for development and unequivocal tackling of residual weaknesses have also proved effective in bringing greater consistency to the quality of teaching.
- Training has been provided for teaching assistants so that their skills have been enhanced. They have attended a range of courses, including supporting mathematics in specific key stages and addressing gaps in pupils' understanding. This enables teaching assistants to make a valuable contribution to improvements in provision and pupils' achievement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included

- accelerating the progress of more able pupils so that they are challenged throughout each lesson and have good opportunities to apply their understanding to new learning
- extending strategies to involve all pupils actively in the introductory parts of lessons so that teachers are able to check their understanding and make adjustments to teaching where necessary
- extending the use of ICT in areas such as the handling of data and exploring simulations so that problem-solving skills, particularly for older and more able pupils, can be further extended.

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

Shirley Billington Additional Inspector