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Mrs S Savage
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Savage

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 24 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. Standards are average.

- Children's mathematical skills on entry to Reception are broadly in line with, and sometimes a little above, that expected for their age. Their mathematical development is good so that by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, their attainment is generally above that expected for children aged five years.
- Standards in Key Stages 1 and 2 showed a downward trend over the period 2006 to 2008, falling to slightly below average in 2008. Pupils did not make enough progress given their starting points, and achievement was inadequate for Year 6 pupils in 2008. Under your leadership, the school has worked hard to arrest and reverse this decline. The introduction of effective assessment systems has allowed well targeted intervention. Teachers' assessments in 2009 at Key Stage 1 show a rise in the proportion of pupils reaching Level 2, the standard expected at

age 7. The school's data also shows a rise at Key Stage 2 at the expected Level 4. At both key stages though, too few pupils reach the higher Levels 2a and 3 at Key Stage 1 and Level 5 at Key Stage 2. The day after the inspection, the school received the results of national Key Stage 2 tests in mathematics. These confirm the rise this year in standards.

- The school's data show that there remains a legacy of underachievement in most year groups. While pupils generally make at least satisfactory progress in lessons, there is not yet enough good teaching for all pupils to regain lost ground quickly and reach high standards.
- Teachers assess pupils' progress and attainment in the different areas of mathematics, including in 'using and applying mathematics'. However, scrutiny of pupils' work and discussions with pupils show that this aspect is not as well developed as other areas of the mathematics curriculum.
- There are no significant differences in the performance of different groups of pupils. Those who have learning difficulties make progress broadly similar to their classmates. Girls outperform boys in the early years of school but this is reversed by the end of Key Stage 2.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. Pupils work well in pairs and groups and listen carefully to their teachers and each other. They enjoy mathematics but do not always have good opportunities to develop independence.

Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is satisfactory.

- Most teaching is satisfactory with some good features. General strengths of the teaching include positive relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils. Teachers plan activities that take account of pupils' different needs and abilities. They explain to pupils what they will be learning and some involve them in gauging how well they have done by the end of the lesson; for example, pupils in Year 1 photographed patterns they had made. Teachers emphasise correct use of mathematical language and encourage pairs of pupils to discuss their ideas and reasoning. Good use was made of mini-whiteboards in some lessons.
- Characteristics of the better teaching include teachers' effective questioning that probes and deepens pupils' understanding. Pupils are given time to think things through for themselves and for working independently. Use of real-life contexts and the outdoor environment adds variety and interest but these approaches require fine tuning to secure pupils' better progress.
- Weaknesses in the teaching include the quality of planning in some classes. There is insufficient clarity about what the pupils are to learn and how the chosen tasks will enable that learning. Teaching assistants are not always well deployed during whole-class teaching. Although teachers make good use of interactive whiteboards to introduce activities or methods, pupils have few opportunities to use information and communication technology (ICT) as a tool for learning mathematics.
- Marking is of variable quality and not always meaningful for the age of the pupils.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- Teachers use Primary National Strategy materials to inform lesson planning. Pupils' skills in using and applying mathematics are developed through solving problems but there is little use of investigative approaches.
- In Reception, children enjoy a range of free-choice and adult-initiated activities. Recent work has improved the outdoor area but, as the school recognises, there is more to do to make it a rich learning environment. Useful mathematical questions are displayed beside some activities but most children are not able to read them. The school might explore ways in which the amount of mathematical dialogue for these children might be increased.
- Analysis of data and scrutiny of pupils' work has enabled leaders to identify areas for development, for instance in the use of mathematical vocabulary, and improvements have been made. Data analysis has also informed how pupils are grouped within classes and identified those in need of intervention.

Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are satisfactory.

- In your first year as headteacher, you have won the support of staff enabling the school to work together on key priorities in mathematics. Your accurate view of the quality of provision is underpinned by evidence from monitoring and analysis of data derived from the good systems you have set up to track pupils' progress.
- The subject leader spoke of how she feels more empowered in her role. She keeps appropriate records of her monitoring of lesson planning and scrutiny of pupils' work and shows a grasp of the areas for development. Foundations have been laid for further improvement next year.
- There is scope to improve the quality of development planning by incorporating arrangements for monitoring and evaluation and setting measurable success criteria. Governors are kept informed about developments and the positive impact of actions but also need to know where relative weaknesses remain so that they are better placed to provide challenge for the school.

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

- Lesson observations conducted jointly with you and with the subject leader were evaluated accurately with a good level of mathematical detail. Records of earlier observations include similar pertinent detail, but this does not always come through strongly enough in the section on overall lesson quality and points for the teacher's development.
- You have drawn on a range of opportunities for continuing professional development, in staff meetings and training days and through the local authority's input and courses. Some teaching assistants are studying for mathematical qualifications.
- Your clear expectations of teachers have led to greater consistency, for instance in the implementation of the calculations policy and in the sharing of learning objectives. The introduction of APP has led to teachers' better understanding of age-related expectations, the meaning of learning objectives, and the next steps in learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- continuing to raise attainment, especially of the more able pupils, and eradicating underachievement
- improving the quality of teaching and learning, paying particular attention to the clarity of teachers' planning for progression within lessons and over time
- ensuring all pupils have rich opportunities to use and apply mathematics and to use ICT as a tool for learning and exploring mathematics
- furthering the role of the subject leader in driving improvements in mathematics.

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

Jane Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector