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Mr N Evans
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Dear Mr Evans

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 6 July 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 records of their progress and observation of parts of four lessons and intervention programmes with individual pupils. Year 5 and 6 pupils were not in school during the visit, but Year 6 pupils had completed questionnaires giving their views on the subject. A discussion was held with a group of Year 4 pupils.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement in mathematics is good and standards are above average.

- Children get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the vast majority attain standards that are above average at the end of the Reception Year. Results of standardised assessments at the end of Key Stage 1 show standards that are also above national averages. The most recent results show an increase in the proportion of pupils attaining the higher Level 3, an aspect identified for improvement in the last inspection in June 2008.
- Performance at the end of Year 6 has been more erratic. Although results of national tests show standards are generally above national averages, pupils have

not always made gains at a consistent rate through Key Stage 2. In 2007 and 2008, the 'value added' for these pupils was broadly satisfactory. Over the past year, improving achievement in mathematics has been a key priority for the school. Adjustments have been made to provision and the most recent results show that pupils currently in Year 6 have made good gains in relation to their attainment at the start of Year 3. Half of the cohort has attained the higher Level 5 in national tests, a significant improvement in comparison with last year.

- As the school has identified, pupils throughout the school develop good skills in understanding of number and calculation. Greater emphasis is being placed on enabling them to use and apply their skills for a variety of purposes, including in subjects across the curriculum. However, there is more to do to engage pupils in challenging and sustained investigations that involve higher order skills including developing formulae, formulating and testing hypotheses and making generalisations.
- Observations and discussions show that Year 4 pupils greatly enjoy mathematics and are keen to succeed. They are positive about being taught in ability groups across Key Stage 2. They feel that teaching is generally pitched at the right level and are aware of their targets for improvement.

Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is satisfactory.

- The quality of teaching and learning varies across the school. In the most successful lessons, all pupils are actively engaged from the start so that they are immediately 'thinking and talking mathematics'. This was evident in a lesson with Year 3 and 4 pupils, who avidly made notes as the teacher gave them a series of 'clues' about a particular number. They then compared ideas about which numbers, to two decimal places, might meet the criteria given. By contrast, in other lessons, pupils are invited to give answers on an individual basis to factual questions and teachers miss opportunities to discuss how these are arrived at or to demonstrate processes of calculation. This results in limited gains in pupils' learning and teachers being unable to assess their understanding.
- While interactive whiteboards are often used well to demonstrate key teaching points and to promote pupils' understanding, at times the software used is not entirely appropriate to the task, particularly for younger pupils. Opportunities are missed for pupils to have hands-on practical experience and use information and communication technology (ICT) to extend their knowledge. ICT is used regularly for practice tasks, especially for pupils with learning difficulties, but rarely to extend the skills of the more able, for example, in extended investigations.
- 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. Specific programmes for individual pupils in Years 3 to 6 are highly successful in improving their skills and confidence in key aspects of mathematics.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum throughout the school is based on the new primary framework, supported by two commercial schemes. In Key Stage 2, a new scheme has been introduced in order to extend opportunities for pupils to engage in a variety of

problem-solving activities. This is being used well in lessons to ensure that learning is lively and interactive. The scheme in use at Key Stage 1 places a strong emphasis on knowledge of number and calculation, but provides limited opportunity for pupils to use and apply mathematics.

- There are a few good examples of pupils' engaging in collaborative activities to use and apply their mathematical skills, for example, in the Fairtrade project where they researched and costed the sale of bananas. Overall, however, there are limited opportunities for pupils to engage in challenging investigations and to use ICT as a tool for learning. Pupils themselves identify these areas as aspects of provision that they would like to see improved.

Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- Pupils' performance in English has generally been stronger than that in mathematics but you have taken effective action this year to strengthen provision for the subject. A significant contribution to improvement has been made by reorganising aspects of the arrangements for teaching in Key Stage 2.
- The new subject leader has brought a fresh perspective in reviewing teaching materials and strengthening assessment systems. A well structured action plan is rightly focused on the need to further improve aspects of pupils' achievement. Analysis of pupils' performance is being used well to identify those areas of mathematics that need a particular focus and to evaluate critically the quality of provision in terms of its effectiveness in meeting all pupils' needs.

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

- The introduction of Assessing Pupil Progress (APP) has been used as the main focus for professional development over the past year. All teachers have been involved in this initiative, regularly assessing the progress and attainment of three pupils in their classes. They have also engaged in moderation activities, which you and the subject leader feel have increased their skills in making specific assessments of pupils' understanding of mathematics.
- Individual teachers are observed as part of the performance management process and receive written feedback but this tends to be descriptive or to focus on pupils' responses rather than evaluating the impact of teaching on learning by considering pupils' progress in the lesson. Because the information gained has not been summarised to form an overview of teaching and learning across the school, it has been difficult for leaders to pinpoint the main areas for improvement. Appropriate plans are in place for the subject leader to play a greater role in lesson observations over the next year.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included

- sharing the most effective practice in engaging all pupils in thinking and responding to questions throughout the introductory parts of lessons so that teachers can assess their understanding and make adjustments to their teaching as a result

- increasing opportunities for pupils to engage in investigative work that extends their skills in using and applying mathematics, particularly through greater use of ICT
- ensuring that lesson observations focus closely on the impact that teaching has on pupils' learning and progress and that the information is used to formulate an overview of the quality in order to identify specific areas for improvement.

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