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Mrs P Smith
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Smith

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 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 learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of four lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement in mathematics is good and standards are well above average.

- Children achieve well from a slightly lower starting point in mathematical development on entry to the school than is typical for children of their age. Standards are well above average by the time pupils reach 11, as reflected consistently in the results of national tests taken in Year 6. A substantial proportion of pupils regularly exceed the level expected for their age.
- Progress is good in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. It accelerates further in Key Stage 2 because pupils work more independently and are challenged more. Pupils gain maximum benefit from class and group discussion because they listen well and do not interrupt each other.

- Older pupils use systematic strategies and alternative approaches to investigate problems and solve open-ended tasks. Pupils in Year 6 said how much they enjoyed this type of work because it was more difficult. A similar approach is being developed in other year groups, but, as yet, it is not embedded consistently in planning throughout the school.
- The school responds quickly when assessment records indicate that pupils are underachieving or in need of additional support. High quality intensive support, for short or longer periods, is effective in raising pupils' confidence and helping them to overcome their difficulties. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well and most reach the targets set for them.

Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is good.

- Teachers enjoy teaching mathematics. Their enthusiasm is infectious; it contributes to pupils' motivation to succeed. Some very good questioning was observed that probed deeply to test out and challenge pupils' understanding. Lessons are conducted at a fast pace and pupils are frequently required to complete the work within fixed periods of time. This works well, sharpening their thinking and accuracy.
- Good use is made of information gained from assessment procedures to inform planning and, crucially, to modify it from one lesson to the next if necessary.
- Pupils' written work is well presented. Pupils are encouraged to record their work methodically, which makes it easier for teachers to determine whether they are thinking logically and sequentially. Marking is thorough and positive but it does not always provide sufficient direction to guide pupils towards the next stage in their learning.
- Some good practice was observed in using and applying mathematics that encouraged pupils to think freely and take risks in tackling problems. It was good to see pupils try different approaches when the first one was unsuccessful.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is flexible and well resourced. Support from the local authority in developing teaching strategies and planning for continuous provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 is raising successfully the level of challenge for the younger age groups. This was targeted as an aspect for improvement after the school's inspection in July 2008.
- The school is innovative in seeking out opportunities to stimulate cross-curricular links between subjects. The 'Arty Maths' project, for example, worked in conjunction with artists from an art gallery in Manchester, is impressive. Discussion with pupils indicates that the visual impact of large-scale two and three dimensional work based on shape, scale and measure is consolidating understanding and making mathematics much more meaningful.
- The school is working energetically towards making investigative mathematics an integral part of the work in all year groups. For some teachers, this will mean 'letting go' at times to free-up pupils' thinking.

Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- Leadership and management of the subject are rigorous and analytical. The aim is to make pupils into competent mathematicians who achieve at levels compatible with their ability and age, which they do.
- The subject coordinator leads by example and provides good support for teachers across all key stages. The issues identified for improvement in the development plan for the subject are relevant, appropriate and achievable within the planned timescales. The school is not complacent about its achievement in the subject. It is searching out ways to increase challenge further, particularly in Key Stage 1.

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

- The school is self-critical. It assesses accurately the impact of teaching and learning on individual pupils' progress and is clear about what can be improved further. It is not afraid to seek out and utilise expertise from other sources to improve practices, for example, currently, in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. As a result, teaching is more focused and pupils are responding well to the greater degree of challenge.
- The school has unpicked the pattern of pupils' learning and identified a lack of consistency in developing the use and application of mathematics. Currently, problem-solving and investigative skills tend to be more highly promoted in the older age groups rather than continuously throughout the school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing a coherent approach throughout the school to problem-solving and investigative activities to extend pupils' independent thinking skills further and add to their enjoyment of lessons
- improving the consistency of marking so that feedback makes clear to pupils what they need to do to improve further.

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

June Tracey
Additional Inspector