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Mrs M Owen  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Owen

Ofsted survey inspection programme – mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 22 September 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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the subject is satisfactory.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Overall standards at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage are above average. Data for 2009 show that standards have risen, with higher scores in problem solving, number and reasoning than seen in previous years. There is some variation in how well children do in different areas, with their skills in the use of number being slightly weaker than other aspects. This is a particular focus for improvement this year.

- The small numbers of pupils in each year group lead to some variation in results of assessments and national tests at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2. Analysis of trends over the past three years indicates that standards are broadly average.
- The school has identified that there is scope to accelerate the progress of more able pupils throughout the school. There are indications of improvements in this area. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, there has been an increase in the proportion of children working at the equivalent of National Curriculum Level 1 at the end of the Reception Year. At the end of Key Stage 1, more pupils attained higher levels in 2009 assessments than in previous years. There is still work to do in Key Stage 2, to ensure that more able pupils make consistent progress across Years 3 to 6. A significant proportion of pupils who attain higher levels at the end of Key Stage 1 do not reach Level 5 at the end of Year 6.
- Many Key Stage 2 pupils show good knowledge of number and processes of calculation although, for a minority, weaknesses in aspects of multiplication and division remain. Pupils' skills in using and applying their knowledge are less secure, in part because of a lack of opportunity to engage in open-ended investigations where they can develop different approaches and strategies to solve problems.
- Pupils generally enjoy mathematics and show good application in lessons. They work well together and are keen to succeed, particularly where work is challenging and purposeful. This was evident in a lesson with Years 4, 5 and 6 where pupils were estimating and checking the measurements of objects, such as screws and bricks, and representing their findings using a range of metric units.

#### Quality of teaching of mathematics

The quality of teaching of mathematics is satisfactory.

- Lessons get off to a brisk start with a short number-focused session. Good strategies, such as the use of individual whiteboards, ensure that all pupils can participate in calculating answers. At times, these sessions are pitched at the middle range of the pupils' abilities, resulting in a lack of challenge for the more able and with less able struggling to keep up with their peers.
- Clear objectives are set for each lesson. However, these tend to focus on the skills or processes that will be practised and not on how pupils' understanding of key mathematical concepts is to be improved. As a result, teachers miss opportunities to explore different ways of arriving at answers and to demonstrate, for example, how pupils can apply their knowledge in new contexts.
- During group tasks, teachers regularly check pupils' abilities to cope with the tasks set and are quick to recognise where they lack understanding. Pupils themselves are confident that teachers give them extra help when they need it. Teaching assistants are well deployed to give additional support to small groups, often working with pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and ensuring that they succeed at their tasks.

Pupils who have had extra help in 'morning groups' feel that they have improved their skills and find it easier to understand the work in subsequent lessons.

### Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- Planning is based on the primary framework, supplemented by a commercial scheme. Both you and the subject leader recognise that there is an over-reliance on the scheme, resulting in limited opportunities for pupils to engage in problem-solving and application of mathematics for real purposes.
- Since the last school inspection in July 2008, there has been improvement in pupils' application of their numeracy skills in subjects across the curriculum. Good use is being made of information and communication technology (ICT) to support work in areas such as data handling, for instance in presenting results of surveys.
- Provision is made for gifted and talented pupils through an initiative within the cluster of local schools. The eight pupils who have participated are enthusiastic about the opportunity and, as one explained, like 'having to think hard and work together'. Activities promote their skills in areas such as interpretation of data and using algebra to identify patterns and predict outcomes. There is scope to incorporate some of the work undertaken into the school's own provision so that a wider group of pupils, particularly the more able, can benefit.

### Effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of mathematics is satisfactory.

- The subject leader works closely with you to carry out detailed analyses of pupils' performance in tests or teacher assessments in each year group. These highlight any weaknesses in pupils' skills and competences in different aspects of the subject. Other monitoring activities, such as scrutiny of pupils' work, also contribute to the identification of strengths and weaknesses in provision. Class teachers receive a good deal of information on the areas that need attention but there is a risk that they are being overwhelmed by detail. There is scope to synthesise the information gained to prioritise those areas that need a whole-school focus or attention in a particular key stage.
- The school has accurately identified key areas for improvement, including provision for using and applying mathematics and improving progress for more able pupils, in order to increase the proportion attaining Level 5 at the end of Key Stage 2. Steps are being taken to address these areas, in part through changes in teaching arrangements for pupils at the upper end of the key stage, but it is too early to identify the impact.

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

- A limited number of lesson observations over the past year have focused on strengths in teaching and areas for development. Although these give useful guidance to individual teachers, the observations do not focus enough on the impact of teaching on learning and pupils' progress. Nevertheless, the school has an accurate view of the quality of teaching and recognises the need to improve teachers' subject knowledge in mathematics.
- The programme for professional development has focused heavily on the introduction of the primary framework and subsequently on assessing pupils' progress (APP). Current work on APP is having a positive impact in helping teachers to recognise where there may be gaps in pupils' understanding. There has been little opportunity to consider and share ideas for enhancing teaching skills and ways of improving provision in areas such as problem solving.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the level of challenge in lessons for more able pupils so that they make gains at a consistent rate in year groups throughout the school
- extending opportunities for problem-solving and investigative activities so that pupils can apply their knowledge and skills in a variety of meaningful contexts
- ensuring that lesson objectives focus on how pupils' understanding of mathematics is to be improved rather than on processes or methods of calculation.

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