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Mrs L Blount
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Blount

Ofsted survey inspection programme – mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 15 October 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 included: interviews with you, the deputy headteacher, the mathematics coordinator and two groups of pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the subject is satisfactory.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Pupils make satisfactory progress to reach broadly average levels of attainment in Year 6. The very high proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities in some year groups causes fluctuations in attainment from year to year.
- The targets that are set for pupils in Years 1 and 2, particularly those of average or higher ability, are not always sufficiently challenging to ensure they make consistently good progress each year.

- Good learning and progress were seen in the Reception class where, for example, children counted sheep, put them in the right order from one to 10, and compared two fields to see which had more sheep. Year 3 pupils developed a good understanding of how to investigate whether the total length of all their fingers was the same as the length of one of their arms. They had good fun at the same time.
- Learning for different groups of pupils is uneven in some lessons, especially in those sessions when the whole class is taught together.
- Most pupils enjoy mathematics lessons and participate with enthusiasm. Their books show that they work hard and pay good attention to presenting their work neatly and accurately.

Quality of teaching of mathematics

The quality of teaching of mathematics is satisfactory.

- The main activities in each lesson are usually planned well to provide appropriate levels of challenge for different groups of pupils. For example, more able Year 2 pupils had to solve money problems that involved using two different operations and calculating change from 50p, while less able pupils concentrated on recognising coins and making simple calculations.
- Whole-class teaching is not always matched carefully to the needs of different groups of pupils. This is because teachers do not pitch questions carefully enough to challenge and extend different pupils at their own level.
- Marking is variable in quality and some pupils find it more helpful than others. Where it is most effective it shows pupils the next steps in learning, but teachers do not always follow up to make sure pupils have acted upon their advice.
- Assessment of learning on a day-to-day basis is improving, but does not yet consistently ensure that all lessons build effectively on previous learning. In some classes, pupils are involved well in evaluating their own progress, but this is not consistent across the school.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- Improvements in the curriculum have been interrupted by the recent high turnover of staff, including senior leaders. The school has moved away from using a commercial scheme and is now tailoring work more closely to pupils' widely differing needs.
- Teachers incorporate mathematics into other subjects and this increases pupils' enjoyment. For example, when learning about the Egyptians, Year 4 pupils measured the length of bandages required for a mummy, using trundle wheels on the playground.

- Opportunities for pupils to use and apply their mathematical skills and knowledge in real-life contexts are improving but are not yet integrated fully into each unit of work.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics

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

- The subject coordinator has sustained a clear focus on raising attainment and improving provision during the past 18 months, during which time a number of new staff have been appointed, including you and your deputy.
- The school has set suitably challenging targets for pupils to achieve by Year 6 and has recently strengthened the procedures for monitoring pupils' progress towards these. The systems for evaluating children's progress in the Reception class are not rigorous enough because the school has yet to establish reliable assessments of children's skills on entry to the school.
- There are good systems for identifying pupils who are not making enough progress from term to term. These give rise to specific intervention programmes to tackle gaps in learning.
- The analysis of assessment data and careful monitoring of teaching and learning have identified the right priorities for improvement. The development plan that sets out how these are to be tackled does not have clearly measurable criteria through which staff and governors can evaluate the success of actions taken.

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

- The subject leader uses the evidence from lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work, discussions with pupils and the results of a staff questionnaire to prioritise training needs and to provide support for teachers.
- Regular in-house training is helping teachers to implement new strategies and improve their practice at a sustainable rate.
- Staff work in partnership with another local school and have had opportunities to observe good practice and share ideas and expertise with other teachers.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- making reliable assessments of children's knowledge and skills when they start school and setting challenging targets so that pupils make consistently good progress in Reception and in Years 1 and 2
- using assessment information rigorously to ensure that teaching meets the differing needs of all groups of pupils when the whole class is taught together

- integrating opportunities for using and applying mathematical knowledge and skills into each unit of work.

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

Carole Skinner
Additional Inspector