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Mrs F Brown
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Dear Mrs Brown

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 20 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 made 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the subject, mathematics, is good.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Attainment is consistently above average and sometimes high. It varies from year to year due to the differences between the relatively small cohorts of pupils.
- Most pupils acquire mathematical knowledge and skills at a good rate throughout the school and some make excellent progress. Pupils

confidently select their preferred method when making calculations, for example when multiplying and dividing, and have a good grasp of shape and measurement. In a Year 6 lesson, pupils made good progress when learning how to convert kilograms to pounds and ounces for the first time.

- Pupils sometimes falter when faced with challenges that require them to select the correct mathematical operations to solve complex problems.
- Some lower- and middle-attaining pupils struggle to explain their reasoning or to talk through the strategies they have used. This is often due to gaps in their mathematical vocabulary.
- Pupils thoroughly enjoy mathematics lessons and most take part with enthusiasm, especially when playing games. Year 4 pupils became very excited about 'tables bingo'!

Quality of teaching of mathematics

The quality of teaching of mathematics is good.

- Pupils learn well because teachers plan lessons carefully to build on their existing knowledge and understanding. Activities are matched well to the differing needs of the ability groups within each class.
- Expectations are high and lessons are interesting, especially when mathematical ideas are presented in a relevant context and when pupils are actively engaged in practical activities. This was demonstrated in a Year 5 lesson, where the more able pupils practised measuring to scale and calculated the distances covered by athletes in the Olympic Triple Jump.
- Teaching assistants, who are well-briefed, provide good support for pupils who need additional input to help them master new skills and concepts.
- Opportunities for teachers to assess pupils' learning and for pupils to assess their own progress are built into every lesson.
- In most lessons,, teachers ask probing questions to test the full extent of pupils' understanding and challenge them to explain their reasoning and strategies using appropriate mathematical language. On a few occasions there are missed opportunities to extend learning in this way.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is good.

- The school has recently shifted its main focus for development from writing to mathematics and is in the process of embedding the revised framework for mathematics within a more creative curriculum, with increased emphasis on links with other subjects.
- A whole-school approach to the use of interactive resources in mathematics lessons is helping to make learning more effective, especially for pupils who need visual explanations.

- There are not enough opportunities for pupils to use and apply their mathematical skills and knowledge in a variety of situations from week to week.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics

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

- Rigorous analysis of assessment data has led to accurate identification of the strengths and weaknesses in pupils' understanding and skills. These then become priorities for improvement in the mathematics action plan and in teachers' performance management targets.
- Senior leaders check each pupil's progress from term to term and discuss with class teachers any pupils who are not making sufficient gains in their learning. Additional support is then provided for those pupils who need it, whether in class or through withdrawal for more targeted teaching; for example, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive specific support to help them reach their individual targets for mathematics.
- Regular monitoring of pupils' work and the quality of teaching in lessons helps senior leaders to identify any inconsistencies between classes and between different groups of pupils. However, written evaluations do not always give sufficient attention to the impact of teaching on pupils' understanding and the progress made by different groups in lessons.

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

- You and the mathematics coordinator attend key training events, such as briefings and updates for the Primary National Strategy, and share the information gained with all staff.
- The coordinator benefits from regular meetings with mathematics leaders in other schools which provide opportunities to share expertise and new ideas. These are passed on to colleagues through the close working partnerships within the school.
- As mathematics is now the school's main priority for improvement, a number of teachers are booked on to mathematics courses to extend their own knowledge and skills.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- extending opportunities for pupils to use and apply their knowledge and skills in a variety of ways when conducting mathematical investigations and solving problems
- challenging pupils to explain, in correct mathematical language, their thinking processes and the strategies they use when making calculations and solving problems.

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