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18 November 2009

Dr A Swatland
Headteacher
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Dear Dr Swatland

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 3 November 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 members of the mathematics leadership team and two groups of pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of parts of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the subject is good.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Attainment is above average. Both boys and girls make good progress, but fewer girls than boys reach the higher Level 3 in Year 2 and Level 5 in Year 6. This is mainly due to a lack of confidence, which the school is working to rectify.
- The school's records show that progress is accelerating in response to better teaching and improvements to the curriculum. This was reflected in

the predominantly good learning and progress seen in lessons and in pupils' work.

- Pupils' enjoyment of learning is a key factor in their good progress in lessons. As one Year 4 pupil stated, 'When you're having fun, you achieve more than you think'.
- A few girls perceive themselves as not being very good at mathematics and tend to take a back seat in whole-class discussions, despite teachers' encouragement.
- Through careful monitoring of the progress made by different groups of pupils, the school is quick to spot and tackle underachievement. For example, it has successfully raised the achievement of Black Caribbean pupils.

Quality of teaching of mathematics

The quality of teaching of mathematics is good.

- Teachers are skilful in developing mathematical concepts and understanding through a good variety of activities. These place a strong emphasis on practical tasks and the use of visual resources.
- Occasionally, pupils are passive for too long, listening to the teacher's explanations, and this slows the pace of learning.
- Most teachers extend pupils' learning well by asking probing questions and challenging them to explain their reasoning. This was particularly effective in a Year 2 class where the teacher directed questions to specific pupils to check their understanding and boost their confidence.
- Effective use of 'talk partners' develops pupils' use of mathematical language and their understanding of key concepts. For example, Year 6 pupils exchanged good ideas about how to make shapes rigid, which they then tested.
- In some classes marking is good, giving pupils clear guidance on the next steps in learning. There are also good examples of pupils assessing their own progress and that of their peers. This effective practice is gradually being embedded throughout the school but is not yet consistent.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is good.

- Pupils say the planned activities are interesting and challenging: 'Our teacher has lots of ways of making it fun'; 'I like working things out and learning different methods – it really makes me think hard'.
- Pupils learn well through a good variety of opportunities to solve problems and undertake open-ended investigations. These activities do not yet fully extend pupils' skills in predicting, hypothesising and making generalisations.

- The school is now working to integrate more opportunities for pupils to use and apply their mathematical knowledge and skills in each unit of work, as well as through links with other subjects.
- 'Mathematics Week', earlier in the year, successfully promoted creative approaches to learning. Each class participated in a specially planned investigation focused on the human body. For example, Year 4 pupils investigated whether the children with the longest legs could jump the furthest.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well because of the good provision, both in classrooms and in the highly effective small groups that meet their individual needs.
- Strong links with a specialist school for mathematics enhance the provision for gifted pupils and enable them to access very challenging tasks.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics

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

- You and other members of the mathematics team have high aspirations for the pupils and are focused firmly on raising attainment for all. The impact can be seen in the rising standards in mathematics, particularly in the Reception Year and Years 1 and 2.
- Rigorous evaluation of data informs development planning as well as whole-school and individual targets. Occasionally, there are inconsistencies in the interpretation of progress data in Years 1 and 2.
- Careful monitoring of pupils' progress and regular progress-review meetings with each teacher enable senior leaders to tackle early signs of underachievement.
- Lesson observations focus clearly on learning and progress and follow-up observations check that recommendations have been implemented.

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

- Through their performance targets, all staff share the responsibility for improving teaching and learning in mathematics.
- The school benefits greatly from the expertise of a mathematics specialist teacher for one day each week. She provides excellent training and support for all staff and is helping to ensure consistent approaches throughout the school.
- Your strong links with a neighbouring secondary school, which has a mathematics specialism, are valuable in enhancing teachers' expertise.
- Your rigorous systems for evaluating teaching and learning give teachers clear guidance on how to improve their practice. Training opportunities are provided according to individual needs.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the confidence of the small minority of girls who are capable of achieving higher standards than they currently are
- further extending pupils' skills in using and applying their mathematical knowledge and skills in a variety of contexts.

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