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Mr G Kilner
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Kilner

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 22 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 staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the subject is good.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Pupils make good progress from low starting points. Attainment is broadly in line with the national average and shows strong signs of improvement in response to improvements in teaching and the curriculum.
- Pupils enjoy mathematics lessons because they are actively engaged in learning through a variety of interesting and challenging practical activities.

- Higher-attaining pupils are able to apply their mathematical knowledge and skills well in unfamiliar contexts, when solving problems or carrying out investigations.
- Less-able pupils often struggle with this aspect of mathematics because their language skills are not as well developed and their understanding of mathematical vocabulary is more limited.

Quality of teaching of mathematics

The quality of teaching of mathematics is good.

- Pupils are taught in ability groups in Years 2 to 6. Within these groups, teachers plan work that is closely tailored to the differing needs of the pupils.
- Teachers make effective use of a wide range of visual and practical resources that helps pupils to understand new concepts.
- Occasionally, there are missed opportunities for teachers and learning support assistants to develop pupils' understanding by asking them to explain their reasoning and extend their responses.
- Lessons move along at a good pace, giving pupils sufficient time to practise mental and oral skills as well as written tasks.
- Assessment is satisfactory. The school is currently embedding new systems, such as an agreed marking policy and opportunities for pupils to assess how well they have progressed in lessons. There is already some good practice in these areas but it is not embedded throughout the school.
- Teachers' interpretations and assessments of the levels pupils have reached in different aspects of mathematics are not yet fully consistent.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is a work in progress. Teachers are implementing the revised National Strategy framework and are adapting it to meet pupils' needs. They have recently placed greater emphasis on providing more hands-on learning experiences for all pupils than was previously the case.
- As part of its development of a more creatively planned curriculum, the school is seeking ways to incorporate mathematics more effectively into a range of other subjects. For example, Year 6 pupils learned about coordinates as part of 'Trireme Battleships' game in their topic on Ancient Greece.
- In their drive to raise attainment, teachers are working to improve pupils' ability to use and apply their mathematical knowledge and skills in a variety of contexts. In the past, these have focused mainly on problem-solving but there are now more opportunities for pupils to carry out open-ended investigations.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics

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

- The strong drive to raise attainment in mathematics is at the heart of the school improvement plan and is shared by all staff. Well-focused actions are helping to accelerate pupils' progress and develop greater understanding of mathematical concepts.
- Senior leaders and governors have set challenging targets for the school to achieve and these are reflected in similarly challenging targets for staff and pupils.
- Senior leaders have put in place rigorous systems for monitoring pupils' progress. They analyse this every half-term and identify pupils who may be underachieving, discussing their progress with class teachers and deciding on action to ensure any shortcomings are tackled.
- You have provided a good model for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and its impact on learning and understanding in lessons. This approach has yet to be fully embedded in other leaders' practice.

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

- All staff receive regular training in different aspects of the subject, such as how to ensure that pupils understand learning objectives and the steps they need to follow to achieve success.
- Staff share ideas in phase meetings, for example about different strategies and resources they have used, what worked well and aspects that were less successful.
- Learning support assistants are trained to provide effective support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Some receive training that equips them to deliver specific support programmes for pupils who are underachieving.
- The subject leader reviews teachers' planning and supports them in ensuring progression in learning.
- Your individual meetings with each member of staff identify specific training needs and where expertise can most usefully be deployed.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the rigour and accuracy of assessment, ensuring that marking gives pupils clear guidance on the next steps in learning and that pupils have appropriate opportunities to evaluate their own and others' progress in relation to the objective of the lesson
- extending pupils' skills in using and applying mathematics, especially those who are less able, particularly through developing their knowledge and understanding of mathematical vocabulary.

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