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Mrs C Henson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Henson

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit with my colleague Richard Brooks on 18 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with yourself, a governor, staff and two groups of 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.

- Children join the Reception class with mathematical skills in line with those expected of four-year-olds. Many are familiar with numbers as labels and for counting. By the end of Reception, almost all reach the early learning goals in problem-solving, reasoning and numeracy.
- At the end of Key Stage 1, standards are broadly average but fell to below average in 2009. No pupils reached the higher Level 3 in 2008 or 2009.

- Standards in national Key Stage 2 tests are average which represents satisfactory progress over the time pupils spend in the school. Their progress has tended to accelerate in Years 5 and 6. The attainment of different groups of pupils varies from year to year, but there is no consistent pattern of underperformance.
- The school's data show there is currently some underachievement in most year groups, in part due to discontinuity in staffing and inexperience of some teachers. A range of support programmes is helping identified pupils to overcome difficulties or catch up with ground lost earlier.
- The quality of learning in lessons is satisfactory overall, though the most able pupils do not always make the progress that they should.
- Pupils' behaviour is very good. They work sensibly in groups and independently. Many say they enjoy mathematics and are appreciative of the help they receive from staff with none showing any insecurity about needing such help.

### Quality of teaching of mathematics

The quality of teaching of mathematics is satisfactory.

- Good relationships between adults and pupils and between pupils are evident in all the classes. This sets the scene for learning. In the better lessons, pupils have good opportunities to discuss their thinking in pairs.
- Teachers work hard to devise interesting tasks to suit pupils' varied needs and mix of ages. Sometimes, though, learning objectives are not precisely defined or matched well to planned activities. Conceptual understanding is not promoted consistently well. Well-established routines mean that pupils work conscientiously on set tasks but teachers do not always spot the difficulties they are experiencing or ensure their use of mathematical notation is accurate.
- Teaching assistants work in close partnership with teachers to provide effective support for groups of pupils during the main part of lessons, but sometimes could be better deployed during starter activities.
- Teachers mark pupils' work regularly, identifying errors and providing feedback, such as on whether learning objectives have been met or on presentation, but misconceptions are sometimes missed.
- Self-evaluation by pupils of their learning is in the early stages of development. Some pupils are familiar with their curricular targets. The school has just begun to use guidance on 'Assessing Pupils' Progress' in mathematics.

### Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- Lesson planning is based on the Primary National Strategy framework and gives appropriate coverage of number, shape and data-handling. In the

mixed-age classes, pupils are appropriately grouped by their current levels of attainment which helps the teaching to be tailored to their needs.

- There is no guidance for teachers on approaches they might adopt to develop pupils' conceptual understanding or to promote, in a systematic way, their skills in using and applying mathematics. Information and communication technology is not often used as a tool for learning mathematics.
- Increasingly, pupils apply mathematics within cross-curricular work. Their financial awareness is enhanced through work on projects such as the 'trim trail'.
- Intervention strategies for those working below national expectations or in danger of underachievement are having a positive impact on pupils' confidence and progress but are not properly evaluated.

#### Effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics

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

- Under your leadership, a positive and orderly climate for learning has been maintained despite changes in staffing and above-average mobility of pupils. Staff work together closely and show a readiness to improve their practice. Because literacy has been prioritised, limited progress has been made on an area for improvement, investigative mathematics, set at the school's previous inspection.
- Your systems for monitoring each pupil's progress inform intervention strategies. Analysis of pupils' performance in assessments is enabling additional emphasis on those areas, but this information is not being used to raise questions about the quality of provision, for instance on the effectiveness of teaching approaches.
- The new coordinator has made a good start to her role. She has conducted a scrutiny of pupils' work jointly with the education improvement partner and is beginning to monitor lesson planning. Her grasp of pupils' progress is realistic. She has identified weaker areas and is ambitious about bringing improvement.
- The recently appointed 'numeracy link governor' is keen to become involved in helping the school move forward in mathematics but his role in this is not yet clearly defined.

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

- Staff attend a range of courses and share ideas with each other, providing informal support, but there is no systematic approach to improving teaching and learning in mathematics.
- Feedback on lesson observations for performance management has tended to focus on generic features of teaching rather than the

mathematical detail that would promote better learning. Nevertheless, judgements made by you and the coordinator during the joint observations of lessons were accurate.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raise attainment, particularly in Key Stage 1, ensuring pupils of all ages and abilities are suitably challenged to make good progress
- adopt a systematic approach to improving the quality of teaching
- develop guidance for staff on introductions to topics to secure pupils' conceptual understanding and promotion of their skills in using and applying mathematics
- sharpen the use of outcomes of data analysis and monitoring to help secure more rapid improvement in the quality of provision.

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

Jane Jones  
Her Majesty's Inspector