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20 November 2009

Ms L Cork
Headteacher
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Healough Road
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Dear Ms Cork

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 12 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 you, the staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of parts of five lessons.

The context of this inspection is unusual, owing to the 'confederation' of Reeth and Gunnerside primary schools, which are situated about six miles apart in villages in North Yorkshire. Each morning, after registration, some pupils travel to the other school for their lessons. This year, pupils in Years 3 and 4 and, by parental choice, one pupil in Year 1 are educated at Gunnerside. The rest of the pupils attend Reeth. With your agreement, therefore, this inspection looked at mathematics across both schools in the confederation.

The overall effectiveness of the subject is satisfactory.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Children join the two schools with mathematical skills that are broadly average for their age. Many make good progress during the Reception Year to reach or exceed the level expected of five-year-olds.
- The small numbers of pupils in each year mean that some variation in standards arises naturally. Over the last three years, attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 has been broadly average, though fewer pupils than might be expected reached the higher Level 3 in 2009. At Key Stage 2, standards in national tests have generally been average. However, these fell to below average in 2009 because too many pupils made insufficient progress, particularly the most able.
- It is likely that the turbulence in senior leadership and in staffing during the couple of years before your appointment in June 2009 had a detrimental effect on pupils' progress and the standards attained, particularly in Key Stage 2, where some underachievement remains.
- The quality of learning is at least satisfactory and good in some classes. Pupils behave well and concentrate hard. They enjoy learning mathematics, particularly when activities are practical. Pupils explained that they prefer this year's arrangement of being taught at one school because they feel settled, know where things are, and like to have their work displayed on the classroom walls.

Quality of teaching of mathematics

The quality of teaching of mathematics is satisfactory.

- Teaching was at least satisfactory in all of the lessons observed and some was good with outstanding features. Characteristics of the best teaching included questioning that was skilful in challenging pupils of different ages and abilities. These teachers capitalised on pupils' responses to ask further questions that probed understanding or extended learning. They enabled pupils to think things out for themselves.
- All the teachers planned a variety of interesting activities to meet pupils' differing needs and abilities. Many were practical with opportunities for pupils to apply their knowledge or investigate mathematically, but such approaches are not embedded features of day-to-day practice.
- Weaker features of the satisfactory teaching included a lack of clarity about the mathematics to be learnt, how the activities will enable that learning, and how to secure progression in mathematical learning in lessons and over time.
- Staff have worked hard on improving the use of assessment to support learning. Mini-whiteboards were often used to involve all pupils and provide staff with instant feedback. Strategies such as 'top tips' and the local authority's assessment spider diagrams are involving pupils in their learning and in gauging their progress. The use of curricular targets is in the early stages of development. Teachers are using the assessment grids for 'Assessing Pupils' Progress' though some records show little evidence of using and applying mathematics.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- Teachers use the Primary National Strategy framework for planning for three or more groups of pupils in each class. This provides generally satisfactory coverage of number, shape and data-handling but teachers' emphasis on problem-solving as an integral part of learning mathematics is inconsistent. The use of computers as a tool to support learning is also underdeveloped in some classes.
- Many teachers make good use of practical activities, particularly in the infant class. The schools benefit from a large number of teaching assistants, some of whom are very skilled in supporting pupils' learning in mathematics.
- There is no guidance for teachers on approaches to promote pupils' conceptual understanding and on the systematic development of their skills in using and applying mathematics.
- Pupils spoke about the fun they had, many with a parent, at a mathematics day last year when they solved problems and puzzles while raising money for charity. Parents were provided with a pack of information giving practical guidance on how to support their child's learning in mathematics.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics

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

- Your decisive and clear-sighted strategic leadership has had significant impact in a short space of time and you have won the support of staff, parents and governors. Strong management of practicalities, such as staffing and location of classes, is centred on pupils' best interests. The stability thus secured means that the focus now is on pupils' progress and on securing the best possible provision for them. Morale has risen and the scene is set for improvement.
- The subject leadership role is beginning to develop well; the subject leader had not previously been empowered to influence the quality of provision, despite his strong skills as a teacher of mathematics. Monitoring activities, such as scrutiny of planning and pupils' books, identify areas for improvement but follow-through needs to be sharper to make a difference more rapidly.
- Self-evaluation reflects a realistic view of the quality of provision in mathematics. Priorities for improvement within development plans are generally appropriate.

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

- Staff have benefited from support from the local authority's consultant, for example on planning, and through attendance at a range of courses.
- Records of lesson observations contain useful feedback for teachers. However, sharper attention to mathematical issues is required, for instance on approaches adopted, dealing with misconceptions, and securing progression.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the number of pupils who attain the higher levels at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2
- improving the quality of teaching to secure pupils' consistently good progress
- providing guidance for teachers on:
 - approaches to develop pupils' conceptual understanding
 - planning, teaching, and assessing 'using and applying mathematics'
- increasing the rate of improvement by:
 - placing a stronger focus on mathematical issues when monitoring provision
 - seeking ways to capitalise on the expertise of the best practitioners.

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