

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr J Courtney
Headteacher
Great Sankey Primary School
Liverpool Road
Great Sankey
Warrington
WA5 1SB

Dear Mr Courtney

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 27 January 2010 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 staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of two lessons, three part-lessons and the mathematics club.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is satisfactory.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory.

- According to the school's records, children enter the Nursery with mathematical knowledge and skills that are typical for their age. By the end of the Reception year, mathematical attainment is broadly average, indicating satisfactory progress through the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Pupils' learning and progress are satisfactory in Key Stages 1 and 2. By the end of Years 2 and 6, attainment is average. Standards and progress are gradually improving.

- Average and lower attaining boys have underachieved in the past. Decisive action taken to improve their performance is helping to close the gap in attainment.
- Pupils develop secure calculation skills and a firm grasp of mathematical ideas. They achieve well in handling data but find it more difficult to use and apply their skills to solve mathematical problems.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and work with good concentration. Their enjoyment of mathematics is growing, partly as a result of increased opportunities to investigate and find out more for themselves.

Quality of teaching of mathematics

The quality of teaching of mathematics is satisfactory.

- Teaching is often good during the whole-class teaching part of the lesson. Teachers make effective use of interactive whiteboards to help pupils to visualise mathematical ideas, such as number patterns and using formula to calculate area. Skilful questioning encourages pupils to think and explain; teachers frequently check understanding by asking them to show their answers.
- Learning is sometimes less successful during the latter part of lessons when the published scheme is not used selectively; for example, when more able pupils have to complete easier examples before progressing on to the more demanding tasks. Learning is best when teachers use their assessments of pupils' learning to ensure that all pupils are given sufficiently challenging work from the outset.
- Lessons move along at a good pace and pupils are actively involved, for example working in pairs to calculate answers, which increases their interest in learning.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities benefit from good quality adult support and imaginative use of equipment, such as magnetic fishing games to help with counting.
- Good use is made of assessment to inform pupils of the level at which they are working and to provide clear targets to enable them to reach the next level. However, the marking of pupils' work often does not provide pointers for improvement.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- The school has worked hard to implement the renewed mathematics framework. This is increasing opportunities for pupils to use and apply their mathematical skills to solve problems. However, overdependence on the use of a published scheme, in some parts of the school, is holding back curriculum development.

- Teachers recognise the importance of developing pupils' conceptual understanding. They plan introductory activities effectively to enable pupils to grasp mathematical ideas, such as the notion of inverse operations.
- The curriculum is sensitively adapted to cater for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and is gradually being extended, particularly through information and communication technology (ICT), to raise the challenge for more able pupils, though this is not consistent in all classes.
- The curriculum is adapted effectively to provide additional activities to enable pupils, whose progress has slowed, to catch up.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics

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

- Your good contribution to leadership and management is reflected in the detailed analysis of pupils' attainment, progress and attitudes to learning. The information is presented impressively using ICT and is shared with all staff. Meetings are held and action is taken to raise achievement, evident in the upturn in boys' progress.
- The subject leader provides satisfactory support by attending courses, holding meetings and observing lessons. However, checking pupils' work in their books is not sufficiently thorough to pinpoint and remedy weaknesses in marking or evaluate the impact of the use of the published scheme on pupils' learning.
- Questionnaires are used effectively to seek pupils' views and make adjustments to teaching and the curriculum to improve enjoyment of mathematics. The introduction of mathematical games is a telling example.

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

- Monitoring pupils' progress carefully, setting targets for improvement for classes and individuals and involving teachers in the process, are proving effective strategies in raising the quality of teaching.
- Checking teachers' planning and observing lessons also help to raise the quality of teaching, though observations do not focus sufficiently on the extent to which teachers identify and remedy misconceptions.
- Good training on moderating assessments is helping teachers to make more accurate judgements of pupils' attainment and progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving pupils' capacity to use and apply their mathematical skills to investigate and solve problems

- following the lead provided by some teachers in relying less on the published scheme of work, in order to provide a better match of activities to pupils' different learning needs
- improving monitoring and evaluation by checking pupils' work in their books more carefully to remedy inconsistencies in marking and evaluate the impact of the published scheme on pupils' learning.

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

Colin Smith
Additional Inspector