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Mr R Craven
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Craven

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 24 February 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 and three part-lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is satisfactory.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory.

- The school's records indicate that children are currently entering school with mathematical attainment that is broadly typical for their age. In the past, it was higher than expected for their age. Children's attainment at the end of Reception is broadly average, which indicates satisfactory progress through the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Pupils' learning and progress are satisfactory in Key Stage 1. Attainment by the end of Year 2 was above average in the past but current Year 2 pupils are working at the levels expected for their age.

- Pupils' learning and progress are satisfactory in Key Stage 2. Attainment by the end of Year 6 was average in 2008 and 2009 but, this year, pupils are making good progress and working at above average levels.
- The progress made by boys, girls and lower and higher attaining pupils is similar. Additional support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and for pupils who have fallen behind is proving effective in raising attainment.
- Pupils' conceptual understanding is developing well in Years 5 and 6 but pupils' capacity to solve mathematical problems is underdeveloped in other age groups.
- Most pupils enjoy mathematics, behave well in lessons and work productively together. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 enjoy the challenge involved in investigating and solving mathematical problems.

Quality of teaching of mathematics

The quality of teaching of mathematics is satisfactory.

- Leaders are encouraging teachers to use assessment more purposefully to raise the level of challenge. This is helping to improve the learning of more able pupils.
- Teachers' clear explanations, often using interactive whiteboards and mathematical equipment, help pupils to understand complex ideas such as angular measure, properties of shapes and number sequences.
- Learning is good in Years 5 and 6 because the teacher anticipates pupils' conceptual difficulties, regularly checks their understanding and adjusts the lesson accordingly. This is not done to the same degree in other classes, where misconceptions are not always detected promptly and opportunities to move on briskly when understanding is secure are sometimes missed.
- The marking of pupils' work is good and they are given individual targets to aim for. Consequently, they are clear about what they need to do to improve.
- Teaching is most successful when pupils are challenged to use and apply their knowledge and skills to explore and investigate mathematical ideas. Teaching is not as effective when pupils are expected to work through the pages of a textbook.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- The renewed mathematics framework is being successfully embedded along with the new 'assessing pupils' progress' materials. This is broadening the curriculum, helping to ensure that pupils build on their prior learning and increasing their enjoyment in learning.

- The curriculum provides good opportunities for older pupils to develop conceptual understanding and to use and apply their knowledge and skills in solving mathematical problems. Leaders recognise that opportunities to explore, investigate and solve problems are too limited lower down the school.
- Information obtained from analysing assessments and monitoring pupils' progress is increasingly being used to adjust the curriculum, for example to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, provide catch-up activities and increase the progress of older more able pupils.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics

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

- Observation of lessons is helpful in improving aspects of teaching, such as raising the challenge and increasing the pace of learning. The subject leader demonstrates good practice in teaching mathematics, but he is not sufficiently involved in evaluating the quality of teaching across the school.
- The school's self-evaluation is accurate in identifying areas requiring improvement, for example, in ensuring that pupils have regular opportunities to use and apply their skills in all classes.
- Monitoring pupils' performance and setting more challenging targets are helping to raise achievement.
- The school has established good communication with parents and carers, for example through the provision of online homework for pupils. It is beginning to consider pupils' views to guide forward planning.

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

- The school has developed a useful checklist for lesson observations to guide leaders when making judgements about the quality of teaching and learning. However, the checklist does not highlight sufficiently the extent to which teachers check and improve pupils' conceptual understanding.
- There is good expertise in the teaching of mathematics, particularly in identifying pupils' misconceptions and using them to inform teaching. However, this expertise is not shared sufficiently to benefit all teachers and all pupils.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- sharing expertise to raise the quality of teaching and pupils' progress to good levels in all classes
- ensuring that all teachers make full use of assessment within lessons to promote pupils' conceptual understanding and raise the level of challenge

- making sure that opportunities for pupils to improve their capacity to use and apply their knowledge and skills to solve mathematical problems are equally provided in all classes.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop mathematics in the school.

As explained previously, 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