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Mrs L Harper
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Harper

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 3 March 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 records of their progress; and observation of parts of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Children start school with skills slightly below those expected in problem-solving, reasoning and number. They make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and standards at the end of the Reception Year are above average. Children have a particularly good base of skills in number as a result of high expectations of their abilities to engage with calculations involving numbers beyond ten.

- Good progress is maintained in Years 1 and 2. Standards attained at the end of Year 2 are consistently above average, with a high proportion of pupils attaining Level 3. There has been a trend of girls performing better than boys, with girls reaching exceptionally high standards. This has been a focus for improvement and the gap is closing.
- Analysis of data shows that at the end of Year 2 the small but increasing number of pupils from minority ethnic groups attains at least average standards. However, there is no system for evaluating the progress being made by different groups, for example, by ethnicity or gender, through which the school can check whether all are achieving equally well.
- Most Year 2 pupils have a good understanding of number operations and work confidently with two digit numbers. They know the properties of two and three dimensional shapes and are aware of the need to use particular standard units of measure for different purposes. They apply their knowledge in tackling simple problems, for example, in interpreting information on a bar chart.
- Pupils enjoy mathematics and are keen to succeed. They cooperate readily in paired work and most are confident in comparing methods and answers as they work. They are clear about their targets and feel that these are helpful in enabling them, as one explained, to 'get better at things like number bonds'.

Quality of teaching of mathematics

The quality of teaching of mathematics is good.

- Teachers adapt their short-term planning as they assess, at the end of each lesson, how well pupils are grasping the concept of mathematics that is being taught. In some lessons, teachers also make good use of assessment strategies during whole-class introductions to check pupils' understanding and quickly tackle any misconceptions. In other lessons, opportunities to do this are missed and teachers do not recognise confusion or errors at an early stage.
- Objectives for lessons are shared with pupils so that they are clear about their tasks and what they need to achieve. At the end of the lesson, pupils are encouraged to indicate how well they have understood their work. The development of a range of strategies for self-assessment is promoting their ability to reflect on their learning.
- Good attention is paid to meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teaching arrangements for Years 1 and 2 enable these pupils to be taught in small groups with additional support. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively to support individual pupils or to work with specific groups. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well for practice tasks and to reinforce pupils' understanding of particular aspects of mathematics.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is good.

- Schemes of work for Years 1 and 2 provide a clear structure for planning for particular units of work. There is a strong emphasis on developing pupils' knowledge and understanding of number facts and their abilities to use them, leading to high standards in these areas. However, teachers do not always focus on teaching the most effective methods for calculation and occasionally the approaches used are not the most appropriate.
- Setting arrangements in Years 1 and 2 are successful in ensuring a good level of challenge for more able pupils and targeting additional support for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Work within each set is appropriately differentiated so that a wide range of needs is met.
- Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage has been reviewed and adapted to provide a clearer structure for planning for problem-solving, reasoning and number. Children have a good range of opportunities to develop their mathematical understanding through well-planned practical experiences, with links made across areas of learning where appropriate. Regular, focused group work with a teacher or teaching assistant effectively tackles children's varying levels of understanding and underpins the good progress that they make.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics

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

- The school has a strong track record in attaining above average standards at the end of Year 2. Analysis of performance data has led to a focus on improving the performance of boys and to targeting additional support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The subject leader provides a variety of training for all staff. This ensures a consistent approach to planning and arrangements for assessing individual pupils' progress. A review of the calculations policy is scheduled for the summer term as the school recognises the need to develop more detailed guidance on approaches to teaching particular elements.
- Targets are set for pupils' performance at the end of Year 2 based on their attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Although reasonably aspirational, current targets have been revised recently to raise further the expectations of those pupils whose performance is bordering on average, but who may achieve more highly with some adjustments to provision.

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

- A good range of training opportunities is available to teaching and support staff. These are used to cascade and share information to develop practice within the school. Training on particular approaches to teaching mathematics, such as the use of multisensory resources, has had a positive impact in improving provision for particular aspects of the subject.
- Senior leaders provide effective support for staff who are new to their roles. Discussion with a middle manager, who has recently moved to the

Early Years Foundation Stage, indicates that this has boosted her confidence in adapting teaching methods to suit the developmental and learning needs of young children.

- Teaching is observed regularly and teachers are given individual feedback. Observations include useful points for improvement but could be sharper in evaluating the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- refining systems for monitoring and analysing pupils' progress through the school so that the achievement of specific groups can be evaluated to check that all are doing equally well
- ensuring that teachers use effective strategies in introductory sessions to gauge pupils' understanding and quickly tackle any misconceptions
- developing the calculations policy to include clear guidance on the teaching of effective methods for particular number operations and to clarify ways in which pupils might be expected to show their workings.

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

As I 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

Shirley Billington
Additional Inspector