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Mrs J Luke
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Luke

Ofsted 2010-11 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit with my colleague, Ceri Morgan HMI, on 14 June 2010 to look at work 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of eight parts of lessons and three mental arithmetic sessions.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Children join the nursery with much weaker mathematical skills overall than is typical for their age, most markedly in calculation and knowledge of shape, space and measures. They make good progress in all aspects but using numbers as labels and for counting is their strongest strand.
- Pupils continue to make good progress as they move up through the school and particularly in Year 6. Their attainment in national Key Stage 2 tests has risen significantly over the last few years to broadly average in 2009. Teachers' assessments show the attainment of the current Year 6 cohort is slightly lower, but this nevertheless reflects good progress from pupils' starting points, and taking into account the high proportion who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

- Number remains a particular strength of pupils' achievement in mathematics. The school has identified the need to develop pupils' abilities to use and apply mathematics more widely. Senior staff acknowledge the need to increase the emphasis on securing good learning about shape, space and measures and handling data.
- The school's effective early attention to pupils' personal, social and emotional development and to their communication skills is reflected in their behaviour, which was good, and in their positive attitudes to learning. Pupils are cooperative. They want to do well and concentrate hard, particularly when they are clear about what they have to do. The Year 4 pupils interviewed said they like mathematics but would enjoy more activities such as mathematics days, quizzes and puzzles.

Quality of teaching of mathematics

The quality of teaching of mathematics is satisfactory.

- All of the teaching was at least satisfactory and some was good. Common strengths included teachers' detailed planning with activities tailored to the needs of different groups of pupils. Additional adults were closely involved in the lessons and made a positive contribution to pupils' learning. Teachers' explanations were accurate and reflected their confident knowledge of calculation strategies.
- Teachers used interactive whiteboards to support explanations but missed opportunities to exploit their capacity to provide dynamic images, for instance to reflect shapes, and few pupils used them. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) is underdeveloped.
- There were some inconsistencies in the teaching. Some teachers encouraged the use of 'talk partners', which helped to involve everyone and develop mathematical language and reasoning. Questioning was of variable quality and not all pupils were involved in answering, for instance through the use of mini whiteboards and where teachers relied on answers from individuals who put their hands up, it was unclear how well the other pupils understood.
- Teachers did not always notice errors in pupils' work as the lesson progressed. This was also a feature of marking which was cursory at times and too infrequently helped pupils improve or gain better understanding. A positive aspect of assessment is the use of curricular targets and the way pupils record what they are able to do on meeting the targets.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- Planning is based on the Primary National Strategy framework, supplemented with a range of resources and activities. The calculation policy provides a good structure for progression in the development of pupils' skills as they move through the school.

- Although the school has increased opportunities for pupils to solve problems, these are often number calculations set in words. The school is aware that introducing a broader range of problems and investigative approaches is the next step to strengthening pupils' skills in using and applying mathematics. There is scope to make mathematics a central part of the school's focus on speaking, listening and thinking.
- Practical activities are prominent in the Early Years Foundation Stage but are much less evident in the older classes, despite their role in helping to secure conceptual understanding. Pupils also have too few opportunities to use computers as a tool for learning mathematics.
- The school's effective analysis of assessment data and use of Assessing Pupils' Progress materials have enabled teachers to plug gaps in pupils' learning and tailor support for those in danger of falling behind. Regular mental arithmetic sessions have been introduced as part of a focus on securing pupils' recall and fluency, for instance in number bonds, multiplication and place value.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics

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

- Under your leadership, attainment in mathematics has shown a strong trend of improvement at Key Stage 2, reflecting good achievement for the pupils. Systems for monitoring pupils' progress are thorough with individual teachers involved in discussion with you about their pupils and thereby held to account for their performance.
- The team approach to subject leadership of English and mathematics has ensured broader involvement of staff and supports a whole-school approach to development and improvement, most recently focused on aspects of English. Discussions with two of the team showed their ability to see the way forward in mathematics, for instance to audit teachers' subject knowledge. In turning attention to the next steps, it would be appropriate to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the subject leaders in driving developments and ensuring outcomes of monitoring activities are followed through systematically.
- The school's self-evaluation is broadly accurate and leads to the identification of priorities that are captured in action plans coupled with appropriate staff development. Three teaching assistants recently acquired level 2 qualifications in mathematics but much of the training is provided in-house through the sharing of existing expertise. Staff collaborate well on initiatives and developments, and share a commitment to improving pupils' future well-being and achievements.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising the proportion of teaching that is good or outstanding through:
 - strengthening teachers' subject knowledge to aid their understanding of progression in all areas of the mathematics curriculum

- adopting approaches that promote conceptual understanding, including through practical activities and use of ICT
- improving teachers' use of assessment, particularly in questioning to probe and deepen pupils' understanding, identifying and tackling errors and misconceptions
- building on earlier work on calculation, develop guidance for staff on progression in using and applying mathematics and in key strands of shape, space and measures and handling data
- sharpening the mathematical focus of monitoring activities.

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 under the URN for your school. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Jane Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector