

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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Mrs F Smith
Headteacher
St Charles Catholic Primary School
Bosworth Road
Measham
Swadlincote
Derbyshire
DE12 7LQ

Dear Mrs Smith

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 on 2 July 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 parts of five lessons and an intervention session.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Children join the school with varying levels of mathematical skills but overall below those expected for their age. They make good progress in the Reception year and most continue to make good progress through Key Stage 1. In 2009, attainment rose to above average.
- In Key Stage 2, a number of factors have contributed to pupils' uneven progress in recent years. It is more consistent now with pupils making progress that is at least satisfactory and, in Year 6, accelerating strongly. By the end of the key stage, attainment is average but, as senior staff acknowledge, too few pupils reach the higher Level 5. Skills in problem-solving and application of mathematics are the least well-developed areas.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress similar to their classmates. The intervention session coupled individual challenge and support very effectively. Those pupils who speak little English when they join the school are supported effectively and make good progress in their language skills as well as in mathematics.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning mathematics are excellent and contribute strongly to learning that is good in most classes. Pupils are mature for their ages; they work conscientiously and are not afraid to 'have a go'. In discussions, the oldest pupils agreed with one who said 'the teacher challenges everyone in Year 6' but younger Key Stage 2 pupils find the subject undemanding.

Quality of teaching of mathematics

The quality of teaching of mathematics is good.

- Teachers are enthusiastic and have high expectations of pupils' work rate and behaviour. Lessons start crisply and move into activities that are tailored to the needs of different groups of pupils. During the lessons observed, pupils enjoyed the varied opportunities provided but their exercise books show less variety and a greater emphasis on practice through worksheets than on problem-solving and investigation.
- Teaching assistants are deployed effectively, for instance by working with a small group on a starter activity. Their skilful questioning, for example in guiding children's discussion about numbers of shells on sandcastles, made a positive contribution to learning.
- Teachers' use of assessment is good. Through questioning and use of mini-whiteboards, teachers are able to assess each pupil's understanding quickly. Lesson plans are annotated to aid planning for the next lesson. Examples of good practice in marking showed pupils following up on points made by the teacher. However, there is scope for teachers to pay greater attention to mathematical details, for example precise use of mathematical language and notation.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- Although curricular planning for each class provides satisfactory coverage of the mathematics curriculum, better use could be made of the Primary National Strategy yearly programmes in planning for progression within mixed-age classes. Teachers, especially those who are less experienced, would benefit from guidance on approaches that promote progression and understanding of key concepts, such as place value and proportional reasoning.
- Good use is made of the outdoor environment and practical activities in the infant classes. However, opportunities for problem-solving and investigative work are often separate rather than integral to pupils' day-to-

day learning. In particular, pupils have few opportunities to tackle more complex problems and to express their reasoning.

- Pupils enjoy using computers for mathematical games and practising skills. Year 6 pupils said they have used spreadsheets for displaying statistical graphs but, more generally, pupils have limited opportunities to use information and communication technology as a tool for learning mathematics.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics

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

- As headteacher and subject leader, you have steered a steady course through a period of changes in staffing and senior leadership roles. The current arrangements see effective mathematics teaching in each key stage, with senior teachers providing good role-models for their less experienced colleagues. Teamwork between staff is an established feature of the school's work.
- Your thorough analysis of data gives a secure picture of progress, currently and over time, and is supplemented by lesson observations and linked to teachers' performance management. However, while feedback to teachers on their lessons includes some useful general points, it does not focus sufficiently on mathematics-specific aspects.
- Self-evaluation is broadly accurate although there is a tendency to record what has been done rather than the impact. Appropriate areas for development are identified and feed into improvement plans. The improvements to teaching and use of assessment, and rising attainment, point to the school's good capacity for further improvement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the quality of the curriculum by:
 - reviewing planning for mixed-age classes to ensure all pupils have an appropriate breadth of mathematical experience and are appropriately challenged
 - providing guidance for teachers on key mathematical concepts to aid pupils' understanding and progression
 - integrating more problem-solving and investigative activities
- ensuring feedback to teachers following lesson observations includes mathematical detail in relation to pupils' learning, progress and conceptual understanding.

I hope that 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