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Ms A Hughes
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Hughes

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 5 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.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage, particularly in developing their understanding of number and shape, space and measure. A high degree of attention is given to extending their language skills, which are often at a low base on entry, and this has a positive impact on the gains that they make in calculation. Although progress is also good in this area, attainment overall remains below average at the end of the Reception Year.
- This good start is successfully built on in Years 1 and 2 so that attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 is broadly average. Most pupils are competent in number operations and are beginning to use what they know to solve a variety of simple problems.

- Progress across Years 3 to 6 has been uneven, largely as a result of staffing difficulties. Intensive support and a range of intervention strategies in Year 6 have proved successful in tackling gaps in pupils' knowledge and many have made accelerated gains in their learning over this academic year. As a result, most have reached or exceeded their targets and their attainment is above average.
- The strong focus on securing pupils' grasp of key number facts and understanding of the four operations has resulted in good improvement in these areas. This is more evident at the lower end of the school, but nevertheless is ensuring a better base for using and applying mathematics, an area in which many pupils lack confidence.

Quality of teaching of mathematics

The quality of teaching of mathematics is good.

- Lesson objectives are shared with pupils so that they understand the purpose of the tasks that they are given. Teachers make good use of resources, particularly interactive whiteboards, to explain key teaching points. In some lessons, teachers use a variety of methods effectively to engage all pupils in introductory sessions. In other lessons, pupils can become passive, particularly during lengthy introductions, and teachers miss opportunities to assess their understanding at an early stage.
- Teaching assistants are used well in supporting individual pupils and small groups throughout each lesson. In particular, they make a significant contribution to the good support provided for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, many of whom make good progress in relation to the targets in their individual education plans.
- Teachers are quick to pick up on any pupil's lack of understanding of the tasks given and to provide extra guidance where necessary. Pupils often get helpful verbal feedback on their work and there are examples of clear, evaluative marking that indicate their successes and areas for attention. However, pupils do not have individual targets for mathematics and are not always clear what they are working towards.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- The strong focus on work in number and calculation has proved successful in improving progress in these areas. Work on mental mathematics and strategies such as 'number clubs', with certificates awarded when pupils get to grips with, for example, doubles and multiplication facts, have resulted in many pupils making good gains in these areas.
- Special events, such as 'problem-solving week', enable pupils to work collaboratively on a variety of challenges, such as designing and building a bridge to hold 10 toy cars. Pupils are very positive about such activities. Overall, however, opportunities for using and applying mathematics are under-represented. While there is an expectation that problem-solving

work features regularly on the timetable, this often takes the form of one- or two-step word problems using worksheets rather than pupils engaging actively in exploring mathematical ideas.

- Although some practical opportunities are provided for pupils to use their mathematical skills in subjects across the curriculum, senior leaders have rightly identified that there is scope to extend these.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics

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

- A range of activities, such as analysis of data and an audit of planning, enables the subject leader to identify accurately specific areas for improvement. Although opportunities to observe lessons have been somewhat limited, these have picked up useful areas for development, such as encouraging pupils to explain their reasoning and using number fans and wipe boards to enable more interaction during introductory sessions.
- Frequent reviews of pupils' progress enable the senior leadership team to identify issues that need quick attention. This has resulted, for example, in the provision of additional support in year groups where disruptions to teaching have impacted on pupils' learning in mathematics.
- Changes to teaching arrangements and targeted provision, such as individual tuition, have resulted in Year 6 pupils making good gains in their learning and significant improvements in attainment this year. As the leadership team has recognised, the next step is to ensure that pupils make progress at a consistently good rate in year groups throughout the school, particularly in Key Stage 2.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- extending the range of opportunities for pupils to engage in practical activities that enable them to apply their knowledge of mathematics in a variety of contexts in subjects across the curriculum
- ensuring that in all lessons, every opportunity is taken to engage pupils actively in introductory sessions so that teachers can assess their understanding at an early stage
- introducing targets for individual pupils so that they have a clear view of what they need to do to improve.

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

Shirley Billington
Additional Inspector