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Mr M Prince
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Prince

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 8 December 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 three lessons, plus brief visits to other lessons.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Children start the Early Years Foundation Stage with attainment that is well below expectations for their age. They make good progress during their Reception year and their attainment in problem solving, reasoning and numeracy is broadly average by the time they start Year 1. There is a positive upward trend in children's attainment in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- In recent years, attainment has been broadly average but there was a significant drop in 2010 when pupils' attainment in national tests was low, particularly for girls. Evidence from the visit and the school's detailed tracking data shows that attainment is rising rapidly across the school because pupils make good progress in their lessons and enjoy their learning.

- A strength in most lessons is a very strong focus on the use of paired discussion to encourage pupils to solve problems. In Year 6, pupils successfully solved word problems which required finding fractions and percentages (within the same problem) because they discussed, shared and applied their strategies for calculations with great confidence.
- Pupils of average ability in Year 3, who underperformed in Year 2 in 2010, make good progress in catching up on previous gaps in learning through effective one-to-one support. Across the school, pupils are encouraged to discuss mathematical ideas and concepts with teachers, teaching assistants and each other. This is increasing girls' confidence in their learning. Behaviour in lessons is exemplary because pupils really enjoy learning.

Quality of teaching of mathematics

The quality of teaching of mathematics is good.

- Teachers' planning is good, with a significant strength in identifying the progress that each group of pupils should make by the end of the lesson. This is also a strength in Years 5 and 6 where pupils are taught in sets for mathematics.
- Support teachers and teaching assistants play a vital role in supporting pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities through effective group work where the emphasis is on practical 'hands-on' learning.
- Teachers make good use of interactive whiteboards to introduce new skills, knowledge and understanding. Their questioning skills are good, with a strong focus on pupils explaining, by using correct mathematical vocabulary, how they solve problems.
- Teachers' excellent use of practical resources makes a significant contribution to pupils' good progress; for example in a Year 4 lesson on fractions, pupils found the answer to how to share a pack of 15 biscuits between two people by using real biscuits.
- Teachers mark pupils work regularly and have high expectations of how they should present their work. However, marking does not link consistently to pupils' individual numeracy targets in order to help them with next steps in learning. Currently, in some year groups, pupils have a literacy or a numeracy target, whereas in others they have both.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is the driving force behind pupils' rapidly improving attainment and progress. The use of 'Rich Tasks', for example, which is a project in Year 6 to design and cost a 'Playground Gym', engages and motivates pupils. Year 6 pupils spoke enthusiastically about how they had to draw to scale and calculate the 15% discount on equipment ordered before a certain date. Year 4 pupils talked excitedly about their current 'Treasure Island' theme and how it helps them to understand, thoroughly, compass points and directional language.

- The curriculum has been adapted successfully to improve pupils' achievement and meet their learning needs, with a strong focus on speaking to develop their vocabulary and thinking skills. It is particularly effective in improving the performance of girls.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics

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

- In September 2009, the school joined, on a voluntary basis, the local authority's intensive support programme in order to raise pupils' achievement in English and mathematics. It is evident from discussion that senior leaders, staff and pupils benefit enormously from this programme, especially from the local authority's mathematics support team.
- The raising achievement plan, the school improvement plan and the subject leader's action plan are based on a detailed understanding of issues related to previous underachievement. Senior leaders identified that there were weaknesses in pupils' understanding of word problems and that teaching and learning did not meet the needs of girls. Tackling these two key areas is at the heart of the school's current work and indications are that there is increasing success on both fronts.
- You, the deputy headteacher and subject leaders regularly monitor teaching and learning through lesson observations, work scrutiny and half-termly formal assessments of pupils' progress. As a result, leaders have a detailed picture of pupils' attainment and progress and put intervention programmes in place immediately when potential underachievement is identified.
- Senior leaders have contributed to the development of 'Working Walls' in classrooms. These link well to pupils' current learning and teachers use them effectively to reinforce key teaching points.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that teachers' marking is linked more closely to pupils' individual targets so that they understand their next steps in learning
- introducing individual targets in mathematics for pupils in all year groups.

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 published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

David Curtis
Additional Inspector