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Mr P Heaton  
Headteacher  
St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School  
Belgrave Street  
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Dear Mr Heaton

### **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 15 February 2011 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 two lessons, parts of two lessons and two intervention sessions.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is satisfactory.

#### **Achievement in mathematics**

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Children enter Nursery with knowledge and skills below those expected for their age. They make good progress through the Early Years Foundation Stage and by the end of Reception their attainment is average in all aspects of mathematics.
- Learning and progress are satisfactory in Key Stages 1 and 2 and attainment is average by the end of Years 2 and 6. Decisive action to improve provision has eliminated underachievement and enabled pupils in Year 6 to make at least the progress expected in 2010.
- Historically, lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities have made better progress than average and

higher attaining pupils, given their relative starting points. The progress of average attaining pupils improved substantially in 2010, but some of the more able pupils are still not reaching the levels of which they are capable in all classes.

- Pupils' knowledge and skills are developing securely and more quickly than their conceptual understanding, which is why they experience more difficulty in using and applying their skills to solve mathematical problems.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to learning mathematics. They behave well in lessons, listen attentively and work well independently, for example when using computers. However, pupils' work is not always carefully set out and this can lead to errors in calculation.

### **Quality of teaching in mathematics**

The quality of teaching in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Teachers' clear expositions and probing questioning help pupils to understand mathematical ideas, such as division and decimals, particularly when they are asked to explain their reasoning to a partner or the class.
- Teachers' effective use of practical equipment and the logical methods of calculation taught enable pupils to carry out number operations securely. However, pupils are not encouraged to estimate, approximate and investigate sufficiently to deepen their understanding.
- Good levels of adult support ensure that pupils who find learning difficult are able to reach their targets.
- Teachers use assessment purposefully to ensure that the activities provided are suitably matched to the learning needs of the majority of pupils in the class. However, challenges provided for more able pupils are inconsistent and do not always extend their learning fully.
- In the best lessons, teachers break down learning into small steps and ask pupils to work out answers and show them on small whiteboards. This helps teachers to identify and remedy misconceptions quickly.
- Although the marking of pupils' work corrects errors and addresses misunderstanding, individual targets and next steps are not provided consistently to ensure that all pupils know what they need to do to improve.

### **Quality of the curriculum in mathematics**

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is satisfactory.

- A well-planned Early Year's curriculum, taking account of children's mathematical development and learning needs, enables children to make a smooth transition from Reception into Year 1.
- A carefully constructed policy guides teachers to approach the teaching of calculation systematically and consistently.

- Although additional curriculum time has been provided to increase pupils' experiences of investigating and problem-solving, these aspects of mathematics are not sufficiently woven into daily mathematics lessons or developed meaningfully across the wider curriculum.
- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) is increasingly helping pupils to consolidate and extend their learning, in school and at home.
- Effective one-to-one tuition is proving instrumental in closing attainment gaps. The school is introducing group interventions to accelerate the learning of pupils whose progress appears to be faltering, although this is at an early stage of development in terms of evaluating its impact.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics**

Leadership and management in mathematics are satisfactory.

- As headteacher, you have made a strong contribution to the school's performance by raising the profile of mathematics and uniting staff in halting and reversing the former underachievement in Key Stage 2.
- Good analysis of assessments, setting challenging targets and monitoring pupils' progress towards them are proving effective in increasing the rate of progress and raising attainment.
- Monitoring of lessons has helped to improve the quality of teaching but there has been insufficient checking of pupils' work to identify and eradicate inconsistencies in challenge, marking and presentation.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- ensuring a consistently high level of challenge for more able pupils
- strengthening the curriculum to ensure that pupils improve their proficiency in investigating and solving mathematical problems
- making better use of individual targets and next steps when marking pupils' work to ensure that they know what they need to do to improve
- checking pupils' work thoroughly to ensure that the inconsistencies in teaching and learning are remedied.

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

**Colin Smith**  
**Additional Inspector**