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20 October 2014

Mr M Shaw  
Headteacher  
Tithe Barn Primary School  
Mauldeth Road  
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Stockport  
SK4 3NG

Dear Mr Shaw

### **Ofsted 2014–15 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit with Jane Jones HMI on 14 October 2014 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 you, the deputy headteacher, and the previous and current subject leaders for mathematics; discussions with groups of pupils from Years 5 and 6; observations of teaching in six classes, two conducted jointly with leaders; analysis of a sample of pupils' work and scrutiny of relevant documentation.

### **The overall effectiveness of mathematics requires improvement.**

#### **Leadership and management of mathematics require improvement.**

- The school has a track record of good achievement in mathematics. Your analysis of pupils' attainment and progress has pinpointed where progress is strongest and where it is less strong, for instance in some year groups, in the gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their peers, and in aspects of the achievement of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, this analysis is not reflected in priorities in the improvement plan. The plan identifies some sensible actions, for example, to ensure a smooth transition from one mathematics leader to another and to introduce the new National Curriculum.
- Checks on the quality of mathematics teaching and on the curriculum are not frequent enough and tend to lack mathematical detail, focusing

instead on generic aspects such as presentation and marking. Attention has been given to checking consistency of teachers' approaches to teaching methods of calculation, but pupils' mathematical understanding, their problem solving and reasoning skills have not been monitored nor findings used to identify how teaching might be improved.

- The role of subject leader is underdeveloped. The leaders do not have a detailed enough grasp on the quality of teaching or its impact on groups of pupils' achievement. Training for staff on mathematics has been limited, including on the new National Curriculum.

### **The curriculum in mathematics requires improvement.**

- Teachers have introduced the new National Curriculum as required into Years 1, 3, 4 and 5. The school has invested in new textbooks and online resources that cover the programmes of study for each year group. However, because pupils are working at above average standards, more discriminating use of the resources is required to ensure pupils are challenged appropriately and have their understanding deepened.
- Pupils' written work indicates a lack of focus on developing understanding, reasoning and problem solving, in contrast to the strong emphasis on mathematical knowledge and methods, which enables proficiency. The current practice of working through exercises in the textbook means that not all pupils get to complete the 'think' question at the bottom of the text book page or to explain their thinking. Likewise, the problems in the text book page are often directly linked to the methods pupils have just learnt, which provides practice, but means they do not have to think hard enough mathematically about how to solve the problem.
- Few Early Years Foundation Stage activities, particularly outdoors, relate to shape, space and measures, for example, to support children's problem solving with and understanding of patterns, shapes, capacity and mass.

### **Teaching in mathematics is good.**

- Teachers create a positive atmosphere in mathematics lessons which means pupils are keen to learn and not afraid to ask questions or have a go at a new method or tackling a newly presented formula. Teaching is particularly successful in developing pupils' proficiency in calculating and recalling mathematical knowledge.
- Teachers generally make good use of pupils' errors and misconceptions as teaching points in lessons. They mark pupils' work frequently and some give enough time for pupils to respond to their marking and to improve their work, good practice the school intends to develop further.
- Most teachers monitor their class effectively to check on how well pupils are working and to spot difficulties. They adapt the pace of lessons to ensure pupils have completed work correctly before moving on to the next idea or method. However, they do not move pupils on quickly enough through repetitive exercises in the new textbooks. Good questioning encourages pupils to use and learn new mathematical vocabulary.

## **Achievement in mathematics is good.**

- Across the school, pupils attain standards in mathematics that are above the national average. They make good progress so that, by the time they leave Year 6, almost every pupil has attained the level they should for their age and more than half attain the higher levels. Pupils' progress last academic year was particularly good in Years 5 and 6.
- Pupils are numerate and skilled at mental and written calculations. They have a secure understanding of the number system, counting, and the four rules of calculation.
- Boys and girls achieve similarly well and most pupils with special educational needs make good progress. The small number of pupils whose circumstances make them disadvantaged achieve fairly well but not as well as the rest of the class. This gap is not closing quickly.
- Children's knowledge of counting and number is above average by the end of Reception. Fewer children excel in their knowledge and understanding of shape, space and measures, in part because of a lack of resources and challenging activities, particularly outdoors. Your plans to refurbish and improve the outdoor space are timely.

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

- improving subject leadership of mathematics by introducing more frequent and comprehensive checks on pupils' mathematical understanding and using the outcomes to improve the quality of teaching and the curriculum
- adjusting the curriculum so that it meets the needs of all pupils and places a greater focus on developing pupils' understanding, reasoning and ability to solve problems
- making sure that children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have plenty of chances in the outdoor area to solve problems and reach high standards, particularly in shape, space and measures
- closing the gap in mathematics attainment between pupils whose circumstances make them disadvantaged and their peers.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop mathematics in the school.

As explained previously, 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

**Allan Torr**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**