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Mrs J Mahon
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Mahon

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 on 2 July 2015 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 evaluation of strengths and weaknesses included: interviews with you and the subject leader; discussions with the Early Years Foundation Stage leader, the Year 5 teacher and a small group of Year 5 pupils; observations of teaching in five classes, conducted jointly with you; scrutiny of relevant documentation and a sample of pupils' work.

Leadership and management of mathematics

- You and your subject leader are determined to improve the teaching of mathematics and the achievement of pupils. You have stayed focused on improving the quality of teaching, despite turbulence in staffing and the move to temporary accommodation, and this is now bearing fruit.
- Leaders inspire teachers to be the best mathematics teachers they can be. The professional development programme encourages all staff to reflect on their teaching of mathematics. Links with the local schools provide a forum for sharing practice and a platform for improving teachers' subject knowledge. Consultants deliver frequent training and check its impact on teaching and pupils' achievement. Recent work to enhance teachers' mathematical questioning is having a positive impact on improving pupils' reasoning skills.
- The mathematics subject leader has an excellent knowledge of recently published reports from professional bodies and has distilled their findings for the staff. Her weekly discussions with teachers about their mathematics

planning have supported a consistent approach to developing pupils' mathematical fluency and problem-solving skills. The Early Years Foundation Stage leader has contributed to these discussions, bringing insights into how to encourage pupils' inquisitiveness.

- Checks on the quality of mathematics teaching include book scrutiny, lesson observations, and analysis of data on pupils' progress. The checks have a clear purpose, for example challenge for the more-able pupils. A particular focus has been to ensure that pupils who have gaps in their knowledge and understanding receive effective interventions.
- You have very successfully raised staff's awareness of the interconnection of mathematical ideas. Staff are excited by mathematics and this is conveyed to pupils. While useful guidance for the teaching of calculation illustrates the connectivity of concepts, no similar guidance is offered to staff on teaching statistics and geometry.

The curriculum in mathematics

- Transition to the new National Curriculum has been well planned and implemented. Teachers introduce new concepts through problems or open-ended investigations. For example, in a Year 5 lesson, pupils started by using an array to solve a two-digit multiplication. They were subsequently encouraged to model the array to help them develop a strong conceptual understanding of area. In a Year 3 lesson, pupils began with a practical problem of rationing chocolate to deepen their understanding of fractions.
- Evidence in books shows that pupils have frequent opportunities to undertake investigations on themes such as probability and equations. The increasingly complex questions set by the teachers contribute to developing pupils' conceptual understanding.
- The mapping of the mathematics covered in lessons over a week or more is offered to pupils and displayed for all to see. This helps pupils visualise how mathematical ideas are linked. The pupils add to these 'maps' as they work through their unit of work. This helps to strengthen their fluency.
- The lively and number-rich Early Years Foundation Stage setting, coupled with interesting and well-planned indoor and outdoor activities, ensures that children develop their early understanding of mathematical concepts. I observed children in the nursery confidently picking up the correct amount of pieces of pasta to match the numerals one to ten.

Teaching in mathematics

- Teachers' questioning is a significant strength across the school. Pupils are encouraged to use their reasoning skills, to justify their answers and share their thinking with each other. When teachers intervene, they probe and challenge to help pupils identify misunderstandings.
- Teachers use previous National Curriculum test papers to help them keep a check on how well pupils are making progress in their knowledge and skills. Unlike in the Early Years Foundation Stage, the information they glean from talking about mathematics with pupils, is not recorded and information on

pupils' fluency is sometimes lost. Teachers use tablet computers to help pupils self-assess. Where this practice is embedded, it contributes to teachers' understanding of pupils' mastery of concepts.

- Pupils report that they enjoy lessons. This was evident during my visit to classrooms. Pupils appreciate the variety of mathematics tasks over the term. They have a pragmatic understanding of the value in making mistakes. Teachers' marking and feedback to pupils accurately identifies misconceptions in understanding. The feedback explains errors and what will help pupils move forward.

Achievement in mathematics

- From starting points on entry that are typical for their age, pupils' progress has been variable in the past. Middle- and lower-attaining pupils did not progress as well as higher-attainers and disadvantaged pupils made less progress than other pupils.
- The school has used its additional funding for disadvantaged pupils to provide intensive and effective daily mathematic teaching of basic skills. Part of the staff's professional development programme has looked at involving these pupils in talking confidently about mathematics.
- The school's data show that the school has successfully narrowed the achievement gap for disadvantaged pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. Disadvantaged pupils' achievement of is improving strongly at Key Stage 2 and a gap of almost one year's learning in 2014 has closed to less than a term. Now, in each year group in Key Stage 2, at least a third of disadvantaged pupils are exceeding expected rates of progress. The proportion expected to reach the higher levels is high.
- In lessons, pupils are engaged and learn well. They enjoy manipulating numbers, and see that the mathematics they are learning has practical value. They are keen to apply their learning to many problems that are set to challenge them. The pupils who were previously reluctant to engage in deepening their thinking enjoy working in teams or small groups and are making good progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- extending the guidance offered to staff in teaching statistics and geometry to improve teaching further
- devising ways to check pupils' fluency in mathematics as it develops over time.

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
Jonathan Palk
Her Majesty's Inspector