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Miss M A Tunney  
Headteacher  
John T Rice Infant and Nursery School  
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Dear Miss Tunney

Ofsted 2007-08 survey inspection programme – mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 3 July 2007 to look at work in mathematics. As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on pupils' enjoyment and understanding of 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. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the subject, mathematics, was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory although standards are below average.

- Children enter the nursery with knowledge and skills well below national expectations. Children make good progress and achieve well, although standards as they enter Year 1 are still below expectations.
- Pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 1 and 2 and reach standards at the end of Year 2 that remain below average.
- Standards attained in National Curriculum Key Stage 1 assessments have fallen over the last two years. The school's data confirms that this is in part related to natural year by year variation in the ability of the pupils. Another reason that standards fell was the discontinuity in learning caused by a change in staffing.

- Pupils' behaviour varies depending on the type of activity they are given to do. When tasks are practically based, they set to with a will. However, if they are expected to remain passive for too long, for example, sitting and listening to the teacher, some pupils become restless and their attention wanders.

### Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning in mathematics are satisfactory.

- A number of pupils find good behaviour difficult. A strength of teaching is the way that behaviour is managed and pupils are enabled to complete work. Teaching assistants are deployed well for this purpose and to support those who need a little extra help. However, when pupils are not actively involved, they can become inattentive and the pace of learning slows.
- Planning includes different versions of activities to challenge pupils at their own level.
- Some teachers motivate pupils well through practical activities and questions that do not have a straightforward answer. However, pre-printed worksheets are used too much and this has an impact on pupils' skills of presentation and the pride they take in their work.
- Although the school maintains booklets of targets for pupils, they are not involved enough in their use and therefore do not always have a clear understanding of how well they are doing and how they can improve.

### Quality of the curriculum

The mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- The school makes effective use of the methods of the Primary National Strategy and has already begun work to implement the updated version of the framework.
- The use of exemplar plans linked to the strategy and adapted to the school's needs is a positive feature of the curriculum. It includes opportunities for practical approaches. However, worksheets are overused and the use of information and communication technology to support learning is limited.

### Leadership and management

The leadership and management of mathematics are satisfactory.

- The current subject leader has been in post since January but has quickly acquired a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school's provision for mathematics and a vision of how the subject should develop.
- The school's self-evaluation of the subject is generally accurate. There is a wealth of data that tracks individual pupils' progress through the school; this is used and maintained well.
- Good action planning is in place to improve provision further.
- Targets set for individual year groups are inconsistent in their accuracy and level of challenge. In 2006, many pupils exceeded their targets, indicating that they

may have been set at too low a level; in 2007, over a third failed to reach their targets.

Subject issue: pupils' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

Pupils were ambivalent as to whether they enjoy mathematics. They said that the work they were expected to complete was sometimes too hard or too easy and this affected their enjoyment. In addition, they felt that the behaviour of a small minority was affecting their learning. In lessons where teaching was practically based, for example, when pupils explored the concept of capacity practically, their enjoyment was evident. Children in the Reception class took part enthusiastically as they practised using the vocabulary of position with a puppet. Sometimes, however, pupils' enjoyment was affected when they were expected to sit for a longer period of time. They agreed that they always expect to understand lessons, but were divided as to whether teachers helped if they were struggling.

Inclusion

Inclusion is satisfactory overall. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported by teaching assistants in lessons. In the past, they have been deployed principally with these pupils and others who find learning difficult. However, the school recognised that too few pupils were gaining the highest levels, and so there has been some redeployment to ensure that the most capable also receive additional support. These pupils now also make satisfactory progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- involve pupils in their own learning more by improving the use of individual curricular targets
- ensure that pupils learn more actively in lessons by making more and better use of practical and investigative methods.

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

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Ian Knight  
Additional Inspector