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Mrs Marion Borland
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Dear Mrs Borland

Ofsted 2007-08 survey inspection programme – mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 1 November 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 observations of parts of three lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- The school is working successfully to overcome a legacy of underachievement amongst a significant number of pupils. High turnover of teachers, inadequate teaching and inaccurate assessments have all contributed in the past to slowing the rate of progress for many pupils.
- Standards have varied significantly from year to year in the national tests, partly due to the small number of pupils involved. In Year 6, standards in 2006 were very low, whilst in 2007 they were just above the national average. Indications are that standards are now improving throughout the school in response to

better teaching and more accurate assessments of pupils' knowledge and understanding.

- The school has accelerated pupils' progress over the last two years, particularly in Years 5 and 6. The pupils who left the school last July made very good progress in their final two years, making up considerable lost ground.
- The school's rigorous tracking records show that most pupils are now making at least satisfactory, and in many cases good, progress.
- Pupils often have difficulty in applying existing knowledge in new contexts.
- Pupils are well motivated, enthusiastic learners. They collaborate well when working with a partner and engage eagerly in practical activities.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are satisfactory.

- Teachers use a good variety of approaches and resources to make learning interesting and engaging for the pupils.
- There are good opportunities for pupils to learn through practical activities that have relevance to their everyday lives.
- Flexible setting arrangements and small teaching groups enable teachers to meet the needs of each pupil effectively.
- Some teachers are using the new colour marking scheme very well to celebrate the good ('tickled pink' comments) and to show where improvements could be made ('green for growth') but this is not yet consistent throughout the school.
- Pupils are not yet sufficiently involved in setting their own targets and reviewing their progress towards them.
- Questioning techniques do not always extend pupils' ability to explain their reasoning or the strategies they have used to solve problems.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- The school has embraced the revised national strategy with enthusiasm. Teachers are adapting it to meet the specific needs of Longvernal pupils. The curriculum is being reviewed and evaluated as each unit of work is taught.
- Having identified problem solving as a relatively weaker area, the school has recently introduced new resources to support this aspect of learning. This continues to be a focus for improvement.
- Information and communication technology is used well to support learning in mathematics.
- Effective links are being developed with other subjects to ensure that pupils use their mathematical skills in a range of contexts, for example taking measurements and creating graphs in science.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good.

- Your high aspirations for the school and rigorous analysis of the reasons for past underachievement have led to accelerated progress over the last two years. You have successfully established a climate of high expectations amongst all staff.
- The subject leader has a good understanding of the subject's strengths and areas where improvement is needed. She has devised a clear plan of action to raise standards further. Her thorough analysis of test results helps to focus teachers' attention on key areas where pupils' knowledge and skills are weak.
- The school sets challenging targets for each pupil and there are very rigorous systems for tracking and analysing pupils' progress. These have been instrumental in identifying underachievement and providing additional support to boost pupils' attainment. As a result, progress is accelerating as pupils move through the school.

Subject issue: pupils' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

Pupils clearly enjoy mathematics lessons, though they are not always able to explain why. Their enjoyment is enhanced by activities such as costing new equipment for the 'Play Pod' within a given budget. This also adds to their understanding of the importance of mathematics in everyday life. Many pupils start school with poor language and communication skills and this is a key factor that affects their understanding of mathematical concepts. Often, pupils are able to arrive at a correct answer but are not able to explain how they did it. They are not always given enough opportunities to explain their reasoning in sufficient detail, both when solving problems and when answering questions in class.

Inclusion

Inclusion is good. There is good provision for pupils with learning difficulties through well-planned intervention programmes. Teachers provide appropriate challenge for more able pupils in lessons. Your very thorough monitoring of individual pupils' progress ensures that each pupil's needs are identified and met through lessons and additional support.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- sharpening pupils' skills in applying mathematical knowledge and understanding in new contexts
- giving pupils more opportunities to explain their reasoning and the strategies they use when making both mental and written calculations
- involving pupils more fully in assessing their own progress towards individual and class targets.

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

Carole Skinner
Additional Inspector