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Mr G Hamilton
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Dear Mr Hamilton

Ofsted 2007-08 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 7 February 2008 to look at work in mathematics.

As outlined in our initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the effectiveness of the school's approaches to improving the quality of teaching and learning 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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

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

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement in mathematics is outstanding and standards are well above average.

- Children's mathematical development on entry is similar to that of children age 3 to 4 years. They achieve well in the Reception class and continue to make good progress in Key Stage 1. Standards are above average in Year 2.
- Pupils achieve very well in Key Stage 2. Standards are well above average in Year 6, which is reflected in the rising trend in results in national tests. A very high proportion of pupils exceeded the level expected for their age in 2007.

- Pupils of all abilities achieve as well as each other. Their success is due to good grounding in computational and mathematical skills and the excellent assessment system that guides the allocation of additional support. This ranges from provision for pupils who lack understanding in specific aspects of mathematics to extra challenge for the most able pupils.
- Pupils are competent in mental mathematics and in applying their learning methodically. They explain themselves clearly using mathematical language.

Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is good.

- Teachers have high expectations that are conveyed to pupils. Pupils respond well to encouragement, both to praise for good work and to help when they are unsure about the next steps in their learning. Hence, pupils grow in confidence and become more independent learners.
- The assessment system is rigorous. It takes account of information from many sources and leads to rapid and sustained response if there is a risk of underachievement.
- Some outstanding teaching was observed. In the Reception class, for example, the work on 3D shapes inspired children's imagination in work that followed during the rest of the day.
- The frequent use of 'talking partners' in lessons provides good opportunities for pupils to test out ideas and to explain their thinking to others.
- Good planning for lessons leads to progressive gains in mathematical knowledge and skills. Not enough opportunities are provided on a regular basis however for work of a more open-ended nature.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is good.

- The flexibility built into the curriculum accommodates well the needs of all learners, for example, through joint planning for pupils in the two mixed-age classes spanning Years 1-3.
- A contributory factor to pupils' high achievement is the rigour with which curricular needs for mathematics are disseminated and integrated into planning. The school agrees that the 'fun and enjoyment' element that comes from applying mathematics in wider contexts could be extended further in most classes.
- Priority for resources focuses acutely on what pupils need in the classroom to enhance their learning. Teachers use the interactive white boards very well as a tool for whole-class teaching but there are not enough computers in the classrooms for pupils to explore mathematics further for themselves.

Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are outstanding.

- Collaborative leadership is driving up standards and achievement in the subject. It is uniting the staff in considering how their own knowledge and expertise can be shared so that all classes benefit from the good practices that already exist.

- There is a strong ethos for learning in mathematics created by proactive leadership that constantly challenges pupils and teachers and mitigates against complacency.

Subject issue: the effectiveness of the school's approaches to improving the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics

- The headline school-wide focus is 'Quality First Teaching'. This is providing the impetus for high quality professional development in mathematics that is culminating in rising standards and achievement throughout the school.
- Frequent and purposeful reviews, involving all staff and specific to the subject, result in regular evaluation of what is going well and what could be improved further. Decisive action by leaders and the tenacity of teachers ensure that initiatives are carried through to conclusion.
- Teaching assistants have good subject knowledge in mathematics and use it well. They engage in training alongside teachers resulting in high quality team teaching in the classroom.

Inclusion

Inclusion in mathematics is good.

- The needs of pupils of all abilities, including the gifted and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are met well. This is mostly through well-planned support within main classes. Intervention groups, often short term, are effective. These are set up without delay when pupils are struggling with specific aspects of mathematics or when they need to be challenged more.
- There is scope for greater challenge in the subject, for all pupils, through more consistent provision of the type of investigative work that prompts pupils to consider alternative approaches.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- providing additional opportunities for teachers to observe work in other classes to broaden their experience of teaching strategies in different age groups
- continuing to seek out and extend opportunities for problem solving and investigatory work to add to pupils' enjoyment of lessons.

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

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

Yours sincerely

June Tracey
Additional Inspector