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Mrs S Hardwick
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Hardwick

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 26 March 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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of parts of six 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 start school with very limited skills and knowledge. They make steady progress but standards at the end of Year 2 remain well below average. Progress in Years 3 to 6 is satisfactory with the majority of pupils making at least expected gains. A minority makes good progress. As a result, standards at the end of Year 6 are below, rather than well below, average.
- Pupils' skills in recalling number facts and their understanding of number operations are weak. This is having an impact on their abilities to use and apply number in problem-solving activities. Improving pupils' knowledge of number and competence in calculation is currently a particular focus for the school.

- Pupils are generally attentive in lessons, though they can 'switch off' if they are not actively engaged in introductory sessions. Most apply themselves to the tasks set, though their confidence in tackling the work they are given is very variable. Lack of competence in applying number operations impedes the work rate of many pupils.

Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is satisfactory.

- Lessons are well structured with a whole-class starter session, focused on improving pupils' skills in use of number, followed by a main element of teaching that usually builds on previous learning. Learning objectives are identified, but occasionally focus on what pupils are going to do rather than what they should learn.
- Questioning is usually relevant but teachers do not always recognise when pupils lack understanding or are confused about how to tackle a number problem. In some lessons, good strategies are used to engage all pupils in working out answers, for example, by using individual whiteboards. This enables the teacher to assess their understanding. In other lessons, because individual pupils give answers to questions, it is difficult for the teacher to gauge how many other pupils are secure in their understanding.
- Teaching assistants make a significant contribution to lessons by supporting pupils who need extra help or encouragement, particularly those with learning difficulties.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- Much of the planning is based on the national numeracy strategy with a variety of resource materials used to support teaching of specific aspects of the subject. All staff have attended training on the new primary framework and this is now being phased in.
- A variety of activities have been introduced to improve pupils' skills in number and these are being used in year groups throughout the school. There is a strong emphasis on improving pupils' quick recall of number facts and encouraging them to recognise which number operations are relevant for particular calculations.
- Planning identifies relevant mathematical language and this is often displayed in lessons and referred to by teachers. However, key terms are not always clearly explained or emphasised enough to give pupils a clear understanding of their meaning and how these might be used.

Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are satisfactory.

- English has been the priority for improvement in recent years and developments in mathematics have been limited. However, the school has identified that pupils make better progress in shape, space and measure than in number. Strategies have been implemented to strengthen provision for this area but it is too early to see the impact.

- The senior leadership team is leading work on strengthening the use of assessment to ensure that teaching meets the range of pupils' needs. This is beginning to have an impact but there is more to do to embed consistent practice across the school.
- The subject leader has recently undertaken some monitoring of the subject. A few lessons have been observed and pupils' work has been scrutinised. However, the information gained has not been summarised to provide an overview of the strengths and weaknesses of provision and to highlight key points for further improvement.

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

- There is a range of initiatives in place to improve the quality of teaching across all subjects. These include enhancing teachers' questioning skills and making better use of assessment in lessons to adjust teaching to meet pupils' needs.
- Training has been provided to strengthen the teaching of number facts and application of these. This has focused on raising staff awareness of age-related expectations in terms of number knowledge and suggesting a range of activities to use in lessons.
- Much of this work is in the early stages and there has been no evaluation of the impact so far.

Inclusion

Inclusion in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Teaching assistants are well deployed to support individual pupils who need help to access the curriculum.
- There are no significant differences in the attainment of pupils speaking English as an additional language and those for whom English is the first language. However, not enough account is taken in lessons of the potential difficulties of many pupils in understanding and using mathematical vocabulary.
- More able pupils sometimes do the same tasks as their peers before moving on to something more challenging. There are indications of improvements here, with Year 6 pupils, for example, feeling that more of the work that they have been given recently is 'making them think'.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving pupils' confidence and competence in knowledge and application of number
- developing strategies to actively engage all pupils in introductory sessions in lessons so that teachers can assess their understanding of mathematical language and methods of working
- strengthen systems for monitoring and evaluating provision for mathematics to inform planning for improvement.

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

Shirley Billington
Additional Inspector