

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
www.ofsted.gov.uk
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs A Burbidge
Headteacher
Gastrells Community Primary School
Kingscourt Lane
Stroud
Gloucestershire
GL5 3PS

Dear Mrs Burbidge

Ofsted 2007-08 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 31 March 2008 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 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 three lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement in mathematics is good and standards are exceptionally high.

- Pupils make good progress and results in the 2007 Key Stage 2 tests show standards are exceptionally high. Key Stage 1 assessments show standards vary considerably from year to year but generally show standards to be above average. Results in 2007 were affected by a larger than usual number of pupils with learning difficulties and were below average, although achievement remained good.
- The achievement of those who attend the centre for pupils with severe to profound communication and interaction difficulties is good.

- Progress in lessons observed was predominantly good. Pupils responded best to stimulating and exciting work; others were more passive learners when the work, although challenging, was less engaging. Pupils say they enjoy mathematics because they like their teachers and they do some fun activities. Pupils' behaviour is excellent.
- All pupils know their targets which are based upon the topic of mathematics being studied.
- The strong emphasis on performing arts within the school enhances team work, and this, along with good opportunities for problem solving within mathematics and good numeracy skills, prepares pupils well for the next phase of their education and life.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is good.

- Lessons are well planned and challenging for pupils in the mixed-age classes. They start with an appropriate oral activity which engages and involves all pupils who then complete a variety of tasks which are well matched to their levels, often with good support from teaching assistants. Teachers use questions well to identify errors or misconceptions and use pupils' responses as teaching points.
- Problem-solving tasks are often used to encourage greater independence when working. Pupils work well in pairs and groups. Very good use is made of information communication technology (ICT) including electronic whiteboards to extend their understanding. Pupils use the class set of laptops and computer room well to complete tasks.
- Lessons conclude with pupils reflecting upon what they have learned often in relation to the class targets. Display is used well to enhance learning.
- Work in books is marked regularly but comments are not used well to inform pupils of their errors and to show them how to improve. While this advice is often given orally, it is not recorded to help pupils later.
- Teachers use their subject knowledge effectively to set high expectations of pupils to use correct mathematical language when they answer, for example, pupils used oblong correctly to show they knew it was not a square.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is good.

- The school makes good use of existing schemes of work, enhanced by activities from the revised framework, to plan for effective lessons in mixed-age classes. Ongoing professional development is supporting staff as they transfer to the revised primary framework. Reception children receive a good mixture of directed and child-instigated activities.
- ICT is integrated well into schemes and all classes often follow a similar topic which helps coherence and more effective use of class targets. Using and applying mathematics is used well in lessons but teachers do not effectively plan for progression in it.
- The school concentrates on support for all pupils rather than concentrating on the small number near grade boundaries for national tests. Good additional support is provided for pupils with communication difficulties.

Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- The new subject leader has evaluated accurately the quality of work in mathematics and has identified appropriate areas to improve. A fuller evaluation of mathematics is planned for next term as part of the school's self-evaluation.
- You have been instrumental in ensuring the quality of teaching has improved and that achievement is good. You have undertaken lesson observations to identify appropriate areas of teaching and learning to develop.

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

- The subject leader and other staff, have attended appropriate courses, and make good use of a local network to identify common issues and develop mutual support. Guidance and ideas have then been disseminated to other staff, including making greater use of the revised framework.
- The school's strong test results and high standards in mathematics mean it is low priority for intervention by the local authority and has not received direct support from consultants.

Inclusion

Inclusion is good.

- Good support is provided for pupils in mixed-age classes so that work is well matched to their needs and abilities and is not repeated unnecessarily.
- Pupils who attend the centre receive very good support and this helps them make good progress.
- The strong emphasis on the use of ICT is consistent across all classes.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- enhancing the use of 'using and applying mathematics' by identifying elements within planning and teaching the skills in a coherent way
- improving the way assessment supports pupils' learning by making sure marking provides written comments on how to improve.

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

As I explained in my 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

Michael Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector