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Mr A Midgley  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Midgley

Ofsted 2008-09 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 01 October 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 two lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory. Standards are below average.

- The school is working successfully to overcome a legacy of underachievement amongst boys. Weaknesses in classroom management and lack of additional support have contributed in the past to slowing the rate of their progress. Indications are that the achievement of boys is now improving and their attainment matches that of girls.
- Children enter school with knowledge and skills well below those expected for their age. The school's assessments show that they make good progress in mathematics in the Nursery and Reception Unit, although not reaching the goals expected before entering Year 1.

- Standards in Year 2 are below average. By Year 6 the gap has closed to some extent, although standards are not quite up to national averages.
- The school's rigorous tracking records show that most pupils are now making at least satisfactory progress, and in some cases, good progress.
- Pupils often have difficulty in applying their knowledge and skills to help them to solve mathematical problems.
- Pupils enjoy their mathematics lessons. They behave well, concentrate on their work and are beginning to show more independence in learning.

### Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is 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 and improve their mental mathematics through games and quick-fire questioning.
- Teachers usually provide tasks that are well matched to pupils' different learning needs. However, the tasks provided for the more able pupils do not always challenge them sufficiently.
- The marking of pupils' work, setting targets and encouraging pupils to assess their own learning are good features in all classes.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is variable. Pupils' conceptual understanding is better developed in some lessons than others.

### Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- The school has introduced the revised National Strategy successfully and is adapting it to meet the specific needs of Dean Field pupils.
- Having identified 'using and applying mathematics' as a weaker area, the school has introduced new resources to support this aspect of learning.
- Effective use is made of information and communication technology to improve pupils' mathematical skills and increase their understanding.

### Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are satisfactory.

- You have made an accurate diagnosis of the school's strengths and weaknesses and shared the information openly with all members of staff. Incisive action plans have been constructed to prompt improvements. The effectiveness is already evident pupils' positive attitudes towards mathematics.
- To raise the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement in mathematics to good levels across the school, a rigorous system of observing lessons, checking pupils' work, and analysing assessments has been introduced. Strategies are devised to make improvements based on the findings. As a result, inconsistencies in teaching and pupils' learning are gradually being eliminated.
- You are well equipped to drive the subject forward. The subject leader has, as yet, only a support role.

- It is too early to judge how effectively the school's improvement strategies will raise standards in mathematics but there is evidence to show that stronger provision for pupils who require additional support is already making a difference.

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

- The school has correctly identified the need to strengthen teachers' subject knowledge to ensure that pupils' conceptual understanding in mathematics is more effectively developed. Training on the teaching of problem solving and using and applying mathematics is about to commence.
- The school has teachers with good subject expertise. They understand how pupils think, anticipate their misconceptions and use this knowledge to guide them forward. This expertise is increasingly being shared to benefit all teachers and pupils. The school is making effective use of this expertise.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring a good level of challenge for the more able pupils in every lesson
- improving teachers' subject knowledge in mathematics to enable them to develop pupils' conceptual understanding and problem solving skills
- strengthening the role of the subject leader.

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

Colin Smith  
Additional Inspector