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Mr S McGill
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Dear Mr McGill

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 10 February 2009 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 three lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory and standards are average.

- Standards vary significantly from year to year due to the very small number of pupils in each cohort. Some pupils have not made as much progress as they should have done in the past and there have been inconsistencies in progress between different year groups.
- The school is now setting suitably challenging targets for each pupil to help accelerate their progress. Improvements in the quality of teaching are also having a positive effect so that pupils are now making at least satisfactory and in some cases good progress.

- The school has identified relative weaknesses in pupils' oral and mental mathematics skills and in using and applying mathematics. All staff are focusing on developing these aspects as a priority.
- Pupils have mixed opinions about mathematics. Some are highly enthusiastic while others do not enjoy certain aspects, such as fractions and measures. This lack of enjoyment stems from insecure understanding in most cases.

Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is satisfactory.

- Lesson plans are detailed and include specific objectives for several different groups of pupils within each of the three mixed-age classes. These objectives are closely reflected in the planned tasks and activities.
- Teachers use a good variety of methods, resources and approaches to suit pupils' different ways of learning. There is a good emphasis on active, 'hands-on' learning.
- Although teachers are making increasingly effective use of assessment information to plan the next steps in learning, they do not always build effectively on what has gone before, for example when making too great a leap in conceptual understanding in teaching fractions.
- In some lessons, teachers' questioning is well targeted to extend pupils' understanding. In others, teachers' questions and explanations do not enhance learning because they are not worded carefully enough to develop understanding.
- The school has introduced good systems for giving pupils verbal feedback on their learning but these are still evolving. Marking is variable in quality and does not always point the way to the next steps in learning.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- The school has improved the curriculum so that it is more carefully tailored to meet the needs of each class and cohort of pupils. This has helped to reduce the reliance on booster classes to help older pupils catch up.
- Recognising the need to improve pupils' mental reasoning skills, the school is now trialling a range of speaking and listening techniques to enhance learning.
- Monitoring records show a significant improvement in the way teachers incorporate using and applying mathematics into their weekly planning. The school recognises the need for further review and development of this aspect in order to promote greater creativity and to develop pupils as genuine mathematicians.

Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- As the subject leader for mathematics, you are giving a firm steer to its development. You are well supported by other teachers who are leading in the development of assessment for learning techniques. The strategies and initiatives

that have already been introduced are having a positive impact on pupils' rates of progress.
- The introduction of robust systems for tracking each pupil's progress and setting individual challenging targets has raised teachers' expectations and is helping to eliminate past underachievement.
- Your regular meetings with each teacher to review the progress of every pupil ensure a prompt response if pupils appear to be underachieving.
- Rigorous analysis of assessment data gives a clear picture of where improvement is needed. This information is used effectively to set targets for teachers and pupils and to guide the deployment of resources.

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

- There is a well-planned programme of training and development for all staff that is focused on the needs identified through self-evaluation, for example mental reasoning and using and applying mathematics.
- Having demonstrated the use of new speaking and listening techniques in each class, you have put in place good systems to evaluate how well they are being implemented. You have also provided training in using and applying mathematics and have enlisted the support of an external consultant to support staff further and increase their confidence in teaching this aspect.
- Teachers are working in pairs to enhance their skills and share good practice.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that teachers reinforce pupils' conceptual understanding before moving on to the next stage in learning to ensure good progress for all pupils
- sharpening teachers' expertise in extending pupils' oral and mental mathematics skills, particularly through high quality questioning
- increasing pupils' ability to use and apply mathematical knowledge and skills in a range of problem-solving and investigative situations.

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

Carole Skinner
Additional Inspector