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Mr D Rowley
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Rowley

**Ofsted 2014–15 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils during my visit with Martin Bell HMI on 29 April 2015 to look at work 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform evaluation of strengths and weaknesses included: interviews with staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of two lessons, short visits to lessons in all the other classes, and an intervention session.

## Leadership and management of mathematics

- Senior leaders analyse and track pupils' achievement in mathematics in detail. They consider each pupil in turn, and work closely with teachers to ensure actions to support pupils' progress are followed through.
- The two subject leaders are line managed by the deputy headteacher who is a mathematics specialist. They are keen to develop their role and leadership skills. They have started to be involved in monitoring activities but not in development planning or analysis of data. Their recent scrutiny of pupils' work checked that teachers were complying with the school's marking policy and were setting problems for pupils, but it did not look closely enough at the quality of these aspects.
- The development plan aims to improve teaching and learning in mathematics but lacks clarity on how actions will have impact. Monitoring and evaluation have been infrequent and not focused on getting underneath subject-specific causes of any weaker provision and identifying features of good practice.

- The subject leaders have led staff training on cross-curricular mathematics. One subject leader has attended some local authority network meetings, but the impact in terms of up-to-date support for her colleagues is not evident.

## The curriculum in mathematics

- The school is implementing the new national curriculum in Years 1, 3, 4 and 5. Teachers benefit from working in pairs to plan lessons, using their copies of the list of mathematical content within the relevant programme of study. However, this planning does not give enough attention to the aims of the national curriculum (fluency, problem solving and reasoning) or to the expectations embodied within it about learning mathematics.
- The school's calculation policy provides guidance on progression in calculation, and takes account of methods used in the partner secondary school. Pupils' books showed number lines being used to good effect. In lessons, some teachers made good use of counting sticks and visual representations of fractions. More broadly, teachers do not have guidance on teaching approaches or use of practical apparatus and images to help all pupils to grasp new knowledge and methods, for example the use of rectangles rather than circles to compare fractions like 2/3 and 5/8.
- Pupils become proficient by practising newly learnt methods. However, the exercises set by teachers are too repetitive and therefore do not enable pupils to deepen their understanding of the mathematical structure or relationships that underpin the new methods and knowledge. Problem solving tends to focus on the same knowledge and methods, and is not supplemented often enough by varied problems that require pupils to draw more widely on their mathematical knowledge and understanding.

## Teaching in mathematics

- A range of evidence points to variation in the quality of teaching across the school. Common strengths included teachers moving around the class, checking pupils' learning and intervening appropriately. All teachers asked questions to assess pupils' understanding, with questions like, 'Have you got them all?' and 'Can you do it another way?' providing extra challenge. Some teachers built particularly skilfully on pupils' responses and made pertinent teaching points. Two had the confidence, while being observed, to adapt their lesson plans in the light of pupils' difficulties.
- Other aspects of teaching, such as teachers' explanations, were less consistently strong. Pupils said that they want to know 'why', not just 'how' a method works. Teaching assistants were not always well deployed.
- Marking is developing in line with the school's new policy. It does not include a system for pupils to respond to teachers' comments and questions. Currently, teachers' comments vary in their usefulness. Some misconceptions in pupils' work were missed. While marking must be manageable, teachers' subject expertise should enable them to be alert to important misconceptions and distinguish them from other errors.
- Some, but not all, classrooms have mathematics displays that support learning, for instance through pupils' work, images and readily available

resources. Around the school, the subject lacks a visible presence.

## Achievement in mathematics

- Pupils' achievement is broadly average throughout the school. Key Stage 2 test results for the last three years show that girls have made less progress than boys, and significantly less progress than girls nationally.
- The number of disadvantaged pupils in each year group is quite low. Over the last three years, a widening gap between the achievement of these pupils and their peers has emerged, and with the achievement of other pupils nationally. The school's data point to narrower gaps currently in Years 4 to 6, but not in the younger classes. The school uses some pupil premium funding to provide additional staffing but has not explored potential barriers to learning mathematics for these pupils. The observed intervention session provided well-focused support for the group of pupils.
- Pupils' mathematical presentation is good. Pupils recall knowledge and methods well and most use mathematical vocabulary accurately. Their attitudes to learning are good and they show a readiness to persevere when presented with challenges. This positive ethos means the scene is set for teachers to raise their expectations of what pupils can achieve, particularly in relation to mathematical reasoning and problem solving.

## Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- strengthening teaching and learning through ensuring that:
  - teaching approaches focus on 'why' as well as 'how'
  - practice and consolidation are well structured to deepen learning
  - reasoning and problem solving are integral to learning mathematics
- developing staff's subject expertise by checking their confidence with the content, aims and expectations of the new national curriculum and then devising a tailored programme of professional development on subject knowledge and teaching approaches
- improving strategic leadership by revising the cycle of monitoring, evaluation and review, and ensuring that:
  - monitoring is subject-specific and acted upon in a timely way
  - evaluation informs development planning
  - the subject leaders' skills are developed to enable them to play their part.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop mathematics in the school. As explained previously, this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Jane Jones**
**Her Majesty's Inspector**