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Ms R Jones
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Jones

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 on 10 June 2014 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 the judgements included: interviews with staff and two pupils from Key Stage 3; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observations of teaching in Key Stages 1, 2, 4 and 5. You accompanied me when observing Key Stages 1, 2 and 5.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Pupils join the school at different times and stages of their education, and from extremely low starting points. Attainment of pupils across the school generally falls within the range p-scale 4 to Level 3. Due to the complex and challenging nature of the pupils' needs, this full range may be found within any class.
- Many pupils display behaviours which reduce their ability to learn. The school has excellent, embedded systems for reducing and removing these barriers to learning, and preparing pupils for mathematical activities, enabling them to make good progress.
- Regular team meetings to discuss individual pupils' progress ensure that any gaps in learning are addressed and pupils are moved on when they are ready.

- The school receives pupil premium funding from some local authorities that place pupils at the school. The school tracks the progress of this group of pupils. Over time, they make similar progress to their peers.
- The two pupils interviewed were keen to share their work in mathematics, and could tell me that they learn about measuring in centimetres, addition, subtraction and place value. One pupil said that 'sometimes maths is a bit hard', but that he likes mathematics lessons.

Teaching in mathematics is good.

- Teachers and other adults have detailed knowledge of individual pupils' strengths, interests and needs which they use when planning individual programmes. In the observed lessons, tutors worked one-to-one with pupils, using their interests to motivate and engage them in mathematical activities. Detailed and accurate assessment ensures that any gaps in knowledge are addressed.
- Staff are acutely aware of changes in mood and attitude of the pupils in their care, and adapt their teaching appropriately. Records of monitoring of teaching show that when such adaptation has not taken place, you have addressed this.
- The staff are highly conscious of the need to ensure conceptual understanding. They recognise that many of their pupils learn initially by rote and find it hard to generalise their skills. Therefore, mathematical skills are taught explicitly within other areas of the curriculum. Examples observed during the inspection included measuring activities in a landscaping lesson, use of money skills in a retail lesson, and revision of counting skills during a reward break.
- Teaching activities are well planned by the teacher and behaviour analyst, and delivered by teachers and other staff in the multi-disciplinary team, usually on a one-to-one basis. As a result, pupils' work is sharply focussed on individual priorities for learning and future life. The school is introducing a greater degree of small-group teaching to encourage pupils to work alongside peers. Observations included some sessions delivered to groups of two pupils.

The curriculum in mathematics is good.

- The school's revised mathematics curriculum framework, introduced in April 2014, is under-pinned by key mathematical skills necessary to live independently. The school's staff have worked together to match vocational competencies to mathematical skills and then track these back through National Curriculum expectations to p-levels. Within this framework, the teaching of mathematics is highly individualised, and designed to engage pupils through their individual interests and strengths.
- Pupils practise their mathematical skills in a wide variety of contexts and environments. Opportunities for simple problem solving are included throughout the school day, for example, 'have we got enough...?' or 'what do we need?' As a result of a highly individualised curriculum, with a focus on the mathematical skills needed in adult life, pupils are very well prepared for the next steps in their learning.

- Achievement in mathematics is accredited through the ASDAN Transition Challenge programme at Key Stage 4, and the Towards Independence programme at Key Stage 5. More-able pupils study modules from the ASDAN Certificate of Personal Effectiveness. All of these accreditation routes contain elements of mathematical learning relating to life skills, such as budgeting, use of measure and basic number skills. More-able pupils, however, would be even better prepared for their future pathways if they were also enabled to achieve a qualification in mathematics.
- The school does not provide guidance for staff on agreed mathematical terminology or computational methods to be taught within the school. This results in an inconsistency of approach, particularly as a large number of staff plan and deliver sessions.

Leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- As a new headteacher, you have prioritised development of the school's core curriculum, including mathematics, to ensure it is relevant and appropriate for the life-long needs of the pupils in the school.
- The subject leader is an experienced practitioner and an accredited primary mathematics specialist teacher. He rightly identifies that, following the school's focus on 'development of the curriculum', the next focus should be on 'delivery of the curriculum', in other words, teaching.
- Together with the subject leader, you oversee the tracking of pupils' progress and ensure that regular team meetings identify any underachievement for individual pupils and then tackle it swiftly.
- An overview of achievement in mathematics is analysed annually and then the proportions of pupils who are reaching their challenging targets in mathematics is ascertained. However, this overview is not gauged often enough to ensure secure judgments on the rate of progress over time.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that pupils who are capable of attaining a recognised mathematical qualification are given the opportunity to do so
- using regular assessment to support secure judgments on whether each pupil's rate of progress is good or not
- developing consistency and accuracy in the mathematical language and computational methods used when teaching concepts.

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.

Yours sincerely

Gaynor Roberts
Her Majesty's Inspector