

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



19 June 2012

Ms A Diggle
Headteacher
Birtley East Community Primary School
Highfield
Birtley
Chester le Street
County Durham
DH3 1QQ

Dear Ms Diggle

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 31 May 2012 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 pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; observation of three lessons, one undertaken jointly with you; and brief visits to five further lessons, including two intervention sessions for pupils in Year 2.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is satisfactory.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory.

- Children join the Early Years Foundation Stage with mathematical knowledge and skills that vary from broadly typical to well below what is typical for their age, with particular weaknesses in calculation. However, as a result of actions taken to improve achievement, they make good progress through the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 and, by the end of Year 2, standards are broadly average overall. However, progress is slower through Key Stage 2, so that standards by the end of Year 6 remain broadly average. In 2011, although the proportion of pupils reaching at least the expected Level 4 in mathematics was broadly in line with that seen nationally, the proportion reaching Level 5 was significantly below. In addition, the progress of those pupils known to be eligible for

free school meals was slower than that of their peers, particularly in Key Stage 2.

- Pupils of all ages enjoy their mathematics lessons and work very well together. For example, pupils in Year 6 enjoyed an extended project, based on a popular television programme, 'The Apprentice'. They were able to apply their knowledge of percentages to calculate the profit they had made from running fruit stalls earlier in the week.

Quality of teaching in mathematics

The quality of teaching in mathematics is satisfactory.

- The quality of teaching varies. The best ensures that tasks and activities are well matched to pupils' needs, although sometimes the range of different tasks in a lesson is too great for teachers to manage learning effectively. Teachers develop mathematical dialogue through the use of 'talk partners' and adjust lessons well to address errors and misconceptions that arise. Where mathematics is set into meaningful contexts, it engages pupils well in their learning. A focus on greater consistency in the use of methods and algorithms is ensuring pupils' greater accuracy in using these techniques.
- The less-effective teaching places too great a focus on pupils' skills and too little emphasis on developing understanding. Moreover, the range of situations to which pupils apply these skills is sometimes too narrow. As a result, pupils do not acquire sufficient depth to their learning or gain greater confidence in tackling unfamiliar problems. Weaknesses in teachers' subject knowledge contribute to slower progress in some instances. Opportunities for pupils to use and apply their mathematics, or to investigate within mathematics, are inconsistent across the school.
- Marking and feedback are regular and most pupils' books are tidy and well presented. However, teachers' written feedback varies in quality and in the extent to which it helps pupils to improve. In the best examples, teachers follow up on pupils' responses to the helpful comments or further questions that they had provided.

Quality of the curriculum in mathematics

The quality of the curriculum in mathematics is satisfactory.

- The school uses the Primary National Strategy materials, supplemented by resources and materials from other sources. However, scrutiny of pupils' mathematics books shows inconsistencies in the development of their skills in using and applying mathematics and in the extent to which more-able pupils receive work that is suitably challenging.
- The review of the whole-school calculation and mathematical methods policy has ensured greater clarity and consistency across the school in the use of these approaches. However, as the school recognises, more work needs to be done to ensure that this policy is fully embedded in all year groups.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics

The effectiveness of leadership and management in mathematics is good.

- The impact of actions taken to address weaknesses in the performance of pupils in younger year groups has strengthened rates of progress, particularly in Key Stage 1. A highly effective approach to targeted intervention is playing a significant role in supporting improvements in this key stage. For example, the use of practical approaches, models and images were very effective features of the intervention sessions seen. You have good plans to ensure that this approach is extended into Key Stage 2.
- In conjunction with the subject leader for mathematics, you have led a whole-staff review of pedagogy and practice in mathematics and this has clarified progression in key strands of mathematics, including calculation. Self-evaluation is accurate and is informed by a wide range of monitoring activities, leading to sharply focussed improvement actions. You have rightly identified that teachers' subject knowledge and their understanding of progression in strands of mathematics are areas for further development.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that all teaching is effective in developing pupils' deeper understanding of mathematics and provides consistently high levels of challenge for more-able pupils
- providing further support for the development of teachers' subject knowledge and understanding of progression in mathematics
- ensuring that pupils have more opportunities to use and apply their mathematics, including solving problems in realistic contexts and investigating within mathematics.

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

As explained previously, a copy of 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

Lee Northern
Her Majesty's Inspector