

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



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Mr J Royal
Headteacher
Blackrod Anglican/Methodist Primary School
Vicarage Road West
Blackrod
Bolton
BL6 5DE

Dear Mr Royal

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 Gaynor Roberts HMI on 21 May 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 pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of eight lessons, of which six were conducted jointly with the subject or senior leaders.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with mathematical skills that vary but are broadly in line overall with those expected for their age. By the ends of Key Stages 1 and 2, their attainment is generally a little above average. Most pupils make good progress from their starting points during their time in the school. Current pupils are achieving similarly well.
- In 2013, boys attained particularly well in the national Key Stage 2 tests, with all 12 reaching the expected standard, Level 4, and nine attaining Level 5. While boys and girls make similar amounts of progress over Key Stage 2, girls have attained less well than boys in the last two years. The school's data for pupils currently in Years 5 and 6 show a gap of around three points, which is roughly equivalent to a year's learning.
- The small numbers of pupils who are supported through the pupil premium achieve slightly less well overall than their classmates by around 1.5 points, which is a smaller margin than seen nationally.

- Pupils enjoy mathematics, particularly puzzles and problems, and use mathematical language well when discussing their ideas and methods. Their behaviour and attitudes to learning are excellent. Pupils of all ages work equally diligently, whether in groups, pairs or on their own, in the classroom and outdoors. They show a maturity that belies their age, reflecting the school's strongly positive ethos for learning.

Teaching in mathematics is good.

- Teachers are skilled practitioners who demonstrate strong generic teaching skills that set the scene for good quality learning. They have high expectations of pupils' contributions, work rate and presentation. In the observed lessons, teachers provided an interesting range of activities for different groups of pupils, with the most able often appropriately challenged. Good use was made of the many additional adults in lessons to provide extra direct teaching and support for groups of pupils.
- Evidence from pupils' written work shows a particularly strong emphasis on securing pupils' knowledge and understanding of number. Some exercises are repetitive rather than incrementing the level of challenge or introducing a mix of problems to solve at an early stage to help develop pupils' deeper understanding. Leaders acknowledged that a next step for the school is to share and establish the best practice in developing pupils' problem-solving skills and mathematical reasoning.
- Teachers' questioning is generally good; teachers listen well to pupils' responses. Teachers' marking is regular and detailed, picks up pupils' errors and provides helpful comments, although occasionally more focused on getting the answer than promoting conceptual understanding. Sometimes, teachers' comments include extra challenge or support through comments such as 'try this ...'.
- Tracking of pupils' progress in mathematics is comprehensive, with Year 6 pupils showing good ownership of this information in focusing their efforts on where they need to improve. Each pupil is set periodically a curricular target, which is recorded on a card, but the timescales are too long to support rapid progress.

The curriculum in mathematics is good.

- The school's investment in the Every Child Counts programme has reaped wider benefits than for those Key Stage 1 pupils it supports. The emphasis on questioning to identify misconceptions, and use of practical apparatus coupled with visual images to help overcome them and develop conceptual understanding have influenced some teachers' practice. The school's new calculation policy incorporates such images and apparatus but not all the teachers are fully familiar with progression in each operation, the links between them, and other relationships and representations in number.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage learn through a wide range of interesting activities. Elsewhere in the school, a carousel of activities provides focused small group teaching in mathematics a couple of days each week. Pupils said they like this model.

- Half-termly newsletters to parents outline the topics due to be taught in mathematics and give practical tips on how parents might support their child's learning. However, no yearly overview is provided.

Leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- The subject leader is a skilled, knowledgeable, up-to-date practitioner. Staff praise her approachability and her ready support and advice. She works closely with the deputy headteacher, who is responsible for the strategic overview of the curriculum. Both are strong role models of mathematics teaching. Because they support teaching by taking small groups, they have a good knowledge of the school's day-to-day work in mathematics.
- You oversee the tracking of pupils' progress and hold regular meetings with teachers, ensuring that they have a good grasp of each pupil's achievement and who needs particular support or challenge. The subject leader analyses pupils' performance in national tests to identify and act on weaker aspects, for instance word problems and measures in 2013.
- Four years ago, the school embarked on an improvement strategy for mathematics. You spoke of how this has transformed the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics. Your analysis of half-termly assessment information points to rising achievement. However, while improvement planning focuses in the main on the right priorities, no arrangements for monitoring and evaluation are specified. This means the school is not able to articulate precisely what impact actions have had on pupils' achievement or the quality of teaching in mathematics. Teachers' planning and pupils' work are scrutinised occasionally, and performance management observations are conducted annually in mathematics, but the findings and feedback to teachers do not include sufficient mathematical detail to help make the step up to outstanding teaching and learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising attainment further, especially of girls
- strengthening, in the light of the new National Curriculum, teachers' understanding of progression and approaches to developing pupils' conceptual understanding and mathematical reasoning
- sharpening the mathematical focus and frequency of monitoring activities to underpin strategic development.

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