

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6855
www.ofsted.gov.uk



20 February 2007

Mrs M Curley
Headteacher
St Mary's Primary School
St Mary's Road
Moston
Manchester
M40 0DF

Dear Mrs Curley

Ofsted 2006-07 survey inspection programme – mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 19 February 2007 to look at work in mathematics. As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on pupils' enjoyment and understanding of 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.

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 five lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Children's attainment on entry is below average, particularly in language and communication skills. The majority make satisfactory progress in the Foundation Stage and reach the early leaving goals for their age in mathematical development by the end of the Reception year.
- Pupils make satisfactory progress overall in Key Stages 1 and 2. Standards are average. They are consistent with pupils' results in national tests taken in Years 2 and 6. Progress is inconsistent however across the year groups in Key Stage 2; assessment data shows that progress in recent years has been faster in Years 5 and 6 than in Years 3 and 4.

- Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because their exact needs are determined and provided for through effective support from teachers and teaching assistants.
- A weakness, in all year groups, is pupils' lack of mental agility in handling numbers, for example, the multiplication tables. Pupils also lack confidence in translating problems written in words to the appropriate calculations.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are satisfactory.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge, which gains pupils' respect and confidence.
- Whole-class discussions reinforce pupils' understanding of mathematical concepts but they sometimes go on too long; questions are not always demanding enough to challenge the thinking of higher ability pupils.
- Planning does not include sufficient regular practice, building year-on-year, in problem solving and investigative work. Consequently, pupils lack confidence in tackling this type of work.
- Teachers modify lesson plans satisfactorily in response to information gained from the assessment of pupils' oral and written work. Individual pupils are not always clear however about exactly what it is that they need to do to improve.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- Procedures for assessing pupils' progress have been strengthened in the past year. They are being used well to target remedial action for pupils who are not making as much progress as expected.
- Recent changes in the organisation of the provision for mathematics in Key Stage 2 are effective. Well-planned intervention strategies for higher ability pupils and those who are on the borderline of the standard expected for their age are leading to measurable improvement in progress this year.
- Provision for children in the Foundation Stage has improved since the previous inspection in May 2005. Children have a better understanding of simple number concepts because they are being encouraged to apply their knowledge to experiences beyond the classroom.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- Critical self-evaluation of pupils' results in mathematics has led to relevant action; for example, currently, the sharp focus in all classes on pupils' quick, accurate and flexible use of number concepts in calculating.

- New procedures for the monitoring of teaching and the review of pupils' work are being worked into the school's systems. It is too early for their full impact to be seen in pupils' results.

Subject issue: pupils' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

Pupils enjoy mathematics most when they are engaged in practical activities and finding things out for themselves. Their skills in language are not as good as their skills in numeracy, which diminishes their confidence when dealing with complex problems written in words. Strategies for tackling investigative work are not built up steadily as pupils move through the school; too much of this type of work is left until Years 5 and 6.

Inclusion

The school is responding well to pupils' specific needs. The recent investment in additional teaching assistants has facilitated the setting up of extra teaching groups, for example in Year 6. This is working well because the planning for higher, middle and lower ability pupils is targeted sharply on aspects of mathematics that consolidate previous learning and channel pupils' thinking towards higher levels.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards further, especially for the higher ability pupils
- planning for the systematic incorporation of investigative work in schemes of work for all year groups
- using information gained from the marking and review of written work to inform pupils what they need to do to improve further.

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

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

June Tracey
Additional Inspector