

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
www.ofsted.gov.uk



21 January 2009

Mrs J Pearson  
Headteacher  
Brownlow Primary School  
Darley St  
Bolton  
BL1 3DX

Dear Mrs Pearson

Ofsted 2008-09 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 21 January 2009 to look at work in mathematics.

As outlined in our initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the effectiveness of the school's approaches to improving the quality of teaching and learning 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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

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 two lessons.

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

#### Achievement and standards

Achievement in mathematics is good and standards are average.

- According to the school's records, children enter the Nursery with mathematical knowledge and skills below those expected for their age. They make a good start in the Nursery but many have little understanding of English, which hampers their learning. By the end of Reception, their attainment is still below that expected for their age, which indicates satisfactory progress through the Foundation Stage.
- Pupils make satisfactory progress through Key Stage 1. Standards by the end of Year 2 are still below average but the gap between school and national standards is closing. Most pupils reach the levels expected but some of the more able ones do not reach the levels of which they are capable by the end of Year 2.

- Pupils make good progress through Key Stage 2. Standards are average by the end of Year 6. Results of national tests in 2008 were higher than in 2007. Standards in Year 6, currently, indicate that the upward trend is set to continue.
- Pupils' achievement in number, calculation, shape and data handling is stronger than their progress in using and applying mathematics. The school is working effectively to improve pupils' problem-solving skills.
- Pupils with English as an additional language and those who require additional learning support, make good progress. Many of these pupils reach the levels expected by the end of Year 6.
- Pupils have good attitudes to learning. They enjoy the subject, particularly when investigating and playing mathematical games. Pupils develop into independent learners as they move through school and have learned to select resources and check their own work by Years 5 and 6.

### Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is good.

- The very good level of adult support provided in lessons makes an important contribution to pupils' learning, particularly those who require additional support.
- Teachers explain new ideas clearly, often using models, equipment and computer screen projections. Such learning helps pupils to understand.
- Teachers are very effective in helping pupils to learn independently. In each classroom there are impressive displays of mathematical vocabulary, methods of calculation and number facts, which pupils refer to as they work.
- In most instances, though not all, teachers assess pupils' learning continually to identify how well they are learning. For example, pupils are asked to hold up their answers on small whiteboards so that the teacher can check. This enables teachers to increase the challenge or pause to reinforce understanding.
- The mathematical tasks provided are usually accurately matched to pupils' different learning needs, although there are occasions in Key Stage 1 lessons when the challenge for more able pupils could be higher.
- Pupils' work is accurately marked and whole-class targets are set for pupils to aim for. The school is developing the system further to ensure that each individual pupil knows where he or she is in mathematics and exactly what to do to improve.

### Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- Children in the Foundation Stage have good opportunities to learn mathematics through structured play, indoors and outside.
- The curriculum is sensitively adapted to meet the needs of pupils with English as an additional language and those who require learning support. This is an important factor in their good progress. The school has an excellent policy to ensure that pupils' calculation skills develop consistently from year to year.
- Many rich opportunities are provided for pupils to investigate and solve mathematical problems. Mathematics is woven into themes, to reinforce skills and understanding and help pupils to understand mathematics in real life. The school is now planning these experiences more precisely for each year group to enable pupils' problem-solving skills to match their good calculation skills.

- Information and communication technology (ICT) is not used sufficiently to help pupils to improve and extend their skills in mathematics. You have rightly identified this as a priority for improvement.

### Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- You lead the subject by example and have presided over a significant rise in standards over recent years. With support from senior staff, you have produced an honest and accurate evaluation of the school's work in mathematics. This clearly identifies the school's many strengths and pinpoints the areas requiring improvement.
- Lessons are regularly observed, pupils' work examined and assessments carefully analysed. These strategies are helping to ensure good teaching and pupils' good progress during a period of staff changes.

Subject issue: the effectiveness of the school's approaches to improving the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics

- The school benefits greatly by having your strong expertise to lead developments in mathematics. You provide much of the training and are able to check whether your recommendations are being put into practice.
- Your analysis of teaching and learning and pupils' progress is the key factor in strengthening the provision and raising standards.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that all teachers make full use of assessment within the lesson to promote pupils' conceptual understanding and raise the level of challenge
- completing the work already started on providing individual targets for pupils to ensure that they can contribute to their own improvement
- making full use of ICT to reinforce and extend pupils' learning of mathematics.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Colin Smith  
Additional Inspector