

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



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Mr I Richardson  
Headteacher  
Batley Parish CE VA Primary School  
Stocks Lane  
Batley  
West Yorkshire  
WF17 8PA

Dear Mr Richardson

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit with Frank Norris HMI on 9 July 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 you, the deputy headteacher in his role as subject leader for mathematics, the Early Years Foundation Stage co-ordinator, groups of pupils in Years 4 and 6, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work, and observation of seven parts of lessons and intervention activities with small groups and individual pupils.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement in mathematics is outstanding. Standards are above average.

- Children join the Nursery with weaker mathematical skills than is typical for their age, particularly in calculation. They make excellent progress so that by the end of Reception, most reach the standards expected of five-year-olds.
- In Key Stage 1 in recent years, standards have been broadly average though slowly declining. 2009 saw a sharper fall, particularly at Level 2 (the standard expected of seven-year-olds) but more pupils reached the higher Level 3.
- Pupils' progress accelerates as they move through Key Stage 2. Pupils reach above average standards in national tests: their achievement is outstanding. Almost all meet the standard expected of 11-year-olds and an above average proportion attains the higher Level 5. This prepares them well for the next stage of their education.

- Standards in using and applying mathematics are not consistently as strong as other areas of the mathematics curriculum.
- The school's work in mathematics makes an outstanding contribution to pupils' personal development. Pupils enjoy learning mathematics. They are confident enough to think out loud and persevere with challenging tasks, unafraid of making mistakes, knowing they learn from them as well as from each other. Their behaviour is excellent.

### Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is outstanding.

- Outstanding teaching was seen in the oldest and youngest classes and there were strengths in all of the observed lessons and intervention sessions.
- Staff have high expectations of pupils mathematically and in terms of their independence as learners. Good attention to pupils' conceptual development and precise use of mathematical vocabulary set the scene for well structured learning.
- Staff take considerable care over the choice of resources and ensure tasks pupils tackle are meaningful. There was some variability, though, in how effectively the activities met pupils' individual needs and starting points. This stemmed from a lack of precision about the next steps in pupils' learning.
- The improved outdoor areas have made a big difference to the quality of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Year 1. These areas provide rich mathematical environments, much more so than other areas of the school.
- There was often good teamwork between staff but the effectiveness of the support provided by teaching assistants varied. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, it was highly effective and contributed greatly to children's mathematical understanding and confidence. In the rest of the school, it was generally strongest in small group and 1-1 situations and where teaching assistants' role in pupils' learning was clearly defined. There is scope to make better use of teaching assistants during whole-class teaching.
- Pupils are aware of their curricular targets. While some marking is exemplary, in other cases it does not always help pupils improve or pinpoint the source of errors.

### Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is good.

- The curriculum meets pupils' needs well and enables them to achieve highly. As leaders have identified through reviews, there is scope to increase the richness of pupils' opportunities to use and apply mathematics.
- The curriculum in the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. The high profile given to mathematics is reflected in the many meaningful hands-on activities that children experience.
- Intervention strategies are well tailored to individual pupils' needs.
- Pupils have various opportunities to use information and communication technology (ICT) but no systematic overview has been conducted to check how coherently pupils' ICT skills are developed and utilised within mathematics lessons.

## Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are outstanding.

- Your insightful and charismatic strategic leadership of mathematics, coupled with the deputy headteacher's complementary strengths and the dynamic new leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage, ensures an ambitious vision for pupils' achievement and attainment with a keen focus on overcoming barriers to pupils' successful learning.
- Self-evaluation is accurate. The rigorous review cycle is key to the school's clearly focused and well structured improvement planning. The cycle involves all staff, ensuring the whole team understands the rationale for particular developments; for instance, work on securing progression in pupils' skills in subtraction.
- Data is interrogated well to establish the progress of individual pupils and to identify aspects of mathematics or particular groups of pupils where progress is less strong. Recent work on 'Assessing Pupils' Progress' is aiding teachers' understanding of the steps in learning, though more work is needed on the assessment of using and applying mathematics.
- Senior staff report that governors provide appropriate support and challenge for mathematics through, for example, reports by the subject leader to governors.

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

- You have built a team of staff who are appropriately qualified though of widely varying experience. Your direct involvement and subject-specific input is helping individuals to develop their practice. Teachers are reflective and show a strong sense of professional confidence and enjoyment in teaching mathematics. During the inspection, they engaged positively with inspectors, keen to improve their skills further.
- The deputy headteacher demonstrates particularly good subject knowledge and a depth of understanding of how pupils learn mathematics. To date, staff have had few opportunities to learn from each other through peer observation. Training is provided in-house and through judicious use of external links and partnerships.
- Teaching assistants' commitment to mathematics is reflected in their acquisition of mathematics qualifications at levels 1 and 2 through studying courses provided at the school after the end of the day.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- honing the precision with which teachers focus on the steps in pupils' learning.

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

Jane Jones  
Her Majesty's Inspector