

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



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Mr S Holmes
Headteacher
St Philip's Marsh Nursery School
Albert Crescent
Marsh
Bristol
BS2 0SU

Dear Mr Holmes

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 13 January 2010 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff; scrutiny of relevant documentation and displays; review of children's learning diaries and records of their progress; and observation of four teaching sessions.

The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.

Achievement in mathematics

Achievement in mathematics is good.

- Children make good progress in problem-solving, number and reasoning but there is some variation in their attainment across different areas. They acquire particularly good knowledge of number and of shape, space and measure. Their skills in calculation, while good, are not at the same level and this is a current area of focus.
- When children leave the nursery, most have a good grasp of counting and matching values one to nine and show awareness of numbers beyond 10. They begin to use language appropriate to adding and subtracting. Children recognise two- and three-dimensional shapes and can group objects using a variety of criteria. Their use of positional and comparative language is particularly good.

- Children are keen participants in group activities, such as playing dice games, sorting objects by colour and counting the number of ducks left when one swims away. Occasionally, their attention span or interest level wanes when a focused teaching session becomes prolonged or the size of the group means a lengthy wait for their turn in a game. They cooperate well and many are confident in organising activities independently, for example, in acting as shopkeepers and customers in role-play.

Quality of teaching of mathematics

The quality of teaching of mathematics is good.

- Whole-class and small-group sessions are organised well with clear learning objectives. Individual children's understanding is assessed against these, with good use being made of nursery nurses and other adults to carry out focused observations. The information is used well to identify next steps in learning and to contribute to careful monitoring of children's progress through learning diaries.
- A range of resources is used well to support teaching and promote children's understanding. Staff are skilled in introducing and using mathematical terms, particularly related to number and shape, space and measures, in directed and child-initiated activities. They occasionally miss opportunities during adult-led activities to extend or consolidate children's understanding in calculation. This occurs, for instance, when discussing the number of children and adults present but without the use of resources, such as a number line, to demonstrate clearly how to find 'one more' or count on to combine two groups.
- Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities benefit from carefully targeted individual support that enables them to participate successfully in activities alongside their peers. They often make rapid progress. The strong emphasis that staff place on using subject-specific language, often exemplified by imaginative use of resources, supports children learning English as an additional language in making good progress.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is good.

- There is good balance in planning based on themes, such as 'changes' and 'opposites', which link learning across different areas, and spontaneous opportunities to respond to children's specific interests and needs. Excellent use is made of stories and rhymes as stimuli for learning. The success of this approach is evident in the way that children are encouraged to develop and extend activities, for example, in adding to the 'Five Little Ducks' to eventually make a group of eleven and then exploring what happens when one or two are taken away.
- Over the past year, short-term planning has been further developed to take account of the wide range of children's abilities and to provide activities to match individual needs. This is being linked to assessment of

their competencies so that planning can become even more responsive to children's stages of understanding.

- A strong feature of the curriculum is the emphasis on mathematics in the environment. This is highlighted through displays and themes in role-play. The outdoor area was not in use on this visit because of adverse weather conditions. However, photographic evidence shows that it is very well resourced to encourage children to explore and apply mathematical ideas, for example, in using large construction equipment.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of mathematics

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of mathematics is good.

- Detailed analysis of children's progress in different aspects of problem solving, number and reasoning has been used well to inform planning for developments in provision. In-service training is being provided this year to further enhance staff's skills in teaching calculation.
- The subject leader has carried out a thorough audit of provision that incorporates a review of the learning environment, use of resources and sampling of activities. This has informed further developments, for example, in extending the use of numerals in small world and imaginative play and enhancing provision for number-related activities in the outdoor area.
- Good guidance has been developed on meeting the needs of children in the early stages of learning English as an additional language. This is linked closely to the key principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage. There are useful practical suggestions on adults' role in activities, use of resources, making links with parents and ensuring that the environment reflects community languages, for example, in displays about number.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- reviewing the organisation of group sessions to make these short, sharp and focused to maximise the impact of teaching on children's learning
- taking every opportunity for the teaching of calculating skills through incidental activities and ensuring that processes of calculation are demonstrated through, for example, use of a number line.

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

Shirley Billington
Additional Inspector