

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231  
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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Mrs P Mulholland  
Headteacher  
Bedlington Station Primary School  
School Road  
Bedlington  
Northumberland  
NE22 7JQ

Dear Mrs Mulholland

### **Ofsted 2013–14 subject survey inspection programme: mathematics**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 23 May 2013 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 senior staff, the chair of the governing body and a group of pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; a visit to a parents' workshop; and observation of eight sessions.

In September 2012, the school's status changed from a first school to a primary school. The former Year 4 pupils are the school's first Year 5 cohort. In addition, the school gained two classes of Year 6 pupils from the now closed middle school. These pupils are being taught in accommodation on the site of the local secondary school.

### **The overall effectiveness of mathematics is good.**

#### **Achievement in mathematics is good.**

- Pupils make good progress over time from often very low starting points. The mathematical knowledge of a significant proportion of Nursery children is more typical of children at least a year younger. Delayed and poor speech is a key barrier to learning for many. Although children make good progress during the Nursery and Reception years, overall attainment is still below that expected for their age on entry to Year 1.

- Focussed teaching has accelerated the progress of the Year 6 pupils and filled gaps in their previous learning. Nevertheless, not all have met their targets: the school's data indicate about 75% have made the expected two levels' progress from leaving Year 2. Two weaknesses are pupils' inability to decide how to tackle a problem and also their insecure understanding of mathematical vocabulary.
- The picture is very different in Year 5 where almost 50% are working at the level expected of Year 6 pupils. These pupils are enthusiastic about mathematics: 'it's fun!' They handle number confidently and particularly enjoy working on interesting problems, such as collating, analysing and presenting data when 'all we know about mathematics comes together'.
- Pupils eligible for pupil premium funding do well. By the end of Year 2, their attainment is slightly lower than their classmates. The school is aware that summer-born boys fare the least well. Support and intervention groups, as well as activities that interest boys, help to boost their learning. Data show that these pupils make significant progress in Key Stage 2.
- A key strength of pupils' work is the neatness of presentation.

### **Teaching in mathematics is good.**

- The teaching in all of the sessions seen was good, confirming the school's own view of the overall quality. Starting the year with several additional members of staff, including newly-qualified teachers, senior leaders acted to strengthen consistency of practice and to raise teachers' expectations of pupils' progress. In-house training, peer coaching and the sharing of ideas with staff of a partner school have had a positive impact.
- Staff are following the school's policy for calculation but less well that for marking in mathematics. In some cases, 'next steps' referred to the next stage in learning rather than a step to help the pupils' thinking or to ensure accuracy. The most effective marking gave pupils a clear indication of how well they met the objective and what they could do better. Teacher and pupils had also responded to each other's comments.
- Staff conscientiously research, plan and prepare lessons and learning materials, using websites, national guidance and their own creative ideas. Use of purposeful situations, such as collecting and helping an imaginary employer with market research or in using data to verify a hypothesis about handspans, really caught pupils' interest. Staff were clear about what they wanted pupils to learn, accurate in their use of mathematical terms, and confident to roam around the subject.
- Staff have a good awareness of each pupil's stage of learning and differentiate tasks to match it. In lessons seen, pupils were working on a common problem but at very differing levels of challenge. Similarly in books, and in homework, work was well matched to ability although the more able often worked through many 'sums' before hitting a 'challenge'.
- A particular strength is teachers' good use of questioning to probe understanding. 'How do we know...', 'Give me a reason ...' and 'So what

are you going to do first ...' typified the way that teachers and teaching assistants checked on and scaffolded pupils' learning.

### **The curriculum in mathematics is good.**

- Staff use national guidance to structure the curriculum and to inform progression in learning. Themes across the curriculum identify mathematical strands, such as data-handling, and opportunities for problem-solving. A particular strength is the flair and creativity in activities and the role-play of a teaching assistant, in video presentations and in person, to give purpose and context for using and applying mathematics.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, the outdoor and indoor curriculum blend well to give children a wide range of experiences that foster early understanding of number, counting, shape, space, time and measures.
- Pupils' work showed good coverage of basic number skills, word problems and practical investigations, without too much repetition. Progression in the use of strategies for addition, subtraction, multiplication and division was clear. Year 5 pupils talked about regular mental-mathematics sessions with help later in working out questions they got wrong or could not do, and homework that included the learning of multiplication tables.
- As well as allocated times for mathematics lessons, the curriculum is sufficiently flexible to develop topics and to provide additional support for groups and individuals to secure their learning. As part of the drive to raise standards, all classes have had at least one designated problem-solving lesson weekly. More able pupils have been given challenges in homework.

### **Leadership and management of mathematics are good.**

- Senior leaders have a shared approach to raising standards in mathematics which is a key priority in the current school development plan. The impact of the action plan for mathematics is evident in the subject's raised profile, as seen in displays and challenges in corridors, and in the increasing attendance of parents and their children at workshops. The heightened emphasis on using and applying mathematical knowledge is paying dividends in older pupils' enthusiasm for the subject.
- The leader for mathematics has a well-informed overview of pupils' attainment, curriculum coverage and quality of provision. Regular monitoring of teaching, planning, the implementation of policies and pupils' progress has steered professional development at an individual and whole-school level. The school development plan has few specific targets related directly to the quality of teaching in mathematics or to pupils' achievement. This is partly because observations of teaching and learning have focussed more on generic aspects than the factors that secure or hinder the learning of mathematical concepts and skills. In turn, the governing body has only a general overview of improvement and the effectiveness of action, such as how well the use of pupil premium funding is contributing to raising standards in mathematics.

- Staff share ideas and are keen to help pupils to do well. Teachers make effective use of teaching assistants' skills and knowledge to support pupils and lead group sessions. There is scope to take this further and introduce proven intervention programmes, especially to support Key Stage 1 pupils.

**Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- the sharing of effective practice in the marking of pupils' work
- developing strategies to ensure that more able pupils do not spend too much time rehearsing mathematical procedures that are already secure
- exploring the possible introduction of nationally recognised intervention programmes to augment current support for the younger pupils
- sharpening the monitoring of teaching and learning in mathematics to give an even clearer picture of aspects to improve, and to inform the setting of precise targets in the action plan.

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.

Yours sincerely

**Sonja Øyen**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**