

# #OfstedMaths Questions and Answers

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Questions were generated by lots of great maths teachers and maths departments.

Responses were given by Sean Harford and Jane Jones on behalf of Ofsted.



## **Q1 How are inspectors without a maths teaching background trained to know what to look for?**

All school inspectors complete training in mathematics. The most recent training focused on the new National Curriculum, its aims and expectations, how it differs from the previous one, and the characteristics of mastery. Paragraph 157 of the new inspection handbook outlines what inspectors will consider when inspecting mathematics teaching and learning. Inspectors do not look for a specific approach, but look at the impact of what a school or teacher is doing.

Please refer to <http://mrreddy.com/blog/2015/04/ofsted-inspection-handbook-correct-as-of-april-2015/>

## **Q2 To develop problem solving in pupils we surely need to give time in lessons to solve open ended problems, if an inspector observes this but the only progress is pupils problem solving skills will this be judged as inadequate?**

Progress in problem solving is a positive, not inadequate! It's a core aim of the National Curriculum. It still needs to be quality problem solving and be used to check and embed knowledge and understanding, or to introduce new ideas. Problems come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes: they do not have to be open-ended, or set in real-life contexts.

## **Q3 When inspected recently I provided evidence of mastery approach & banks of rich sophisticated tasks, accessible for all. We were criticised for this approach (shanghai research) & Ofsted reacted subjectively. Is this how inspectors' practice should be?**

No, but we were not there so we cannot comment. The Complaints process is clearly set out on the Ofsted website should you wish to pursue that.

## **Q4 During very recent inspection, we felt our innovative mixed ability approach to maths was devalued. Does Ofsted STILL expect to see different activities for "tops, middles & bottoms"?**

No, but we may look at how well different groups of pupils in the class are learning.

## **Q5 When looking at progress in books will inspectors appreciate that in mastery approach school work may appear not to be differentiated because the differentiation happened at the time through questioning for depth understanding?**

Yes

## **Q6 In next-step marking, the step will be a new concept or the current concept applied differently or deeper. Therefore it will need to be taught.**

### **How does next-step marking look in maths?**

Our handbook doesn't say there should be next step marking but we will look at how effective it is in promoting learning. A next step in maths does not have to be new content. It could be many different things, including help to overcome a misconception or a recurring error, a refinement to a method or reasoning, or it could provide a 'try this' or 'what if' question.

Please refer to <http://mrreddy.com/blog/2015/04/ofsted-inspection-handbook-correct-as-of-april-2015/>.

Ofsted recognises that next-step marking could be different for different yeargroups and subjects so school marking policies needn't have a uniform approach to next-step marking. As with everything it should be in the best interest of the pupils' learning and it's up to schools to be clear why they've adopted certain policies with pupil learning in mind.

**Q7 How much does the new OFSTED instructions take mastery within the classroom into account or are we still only focusing on results and nothing but**

The Inspection handbook guidelines take mastery into account.

Please refer to <http://mrreddy.com/blog/2015/04/ofsted-inspection-handbook-correct-as-of-april-2015/>.

As for focusing on results, 'results' are often misconstrued to simply mean 'external exam results'. We look at many aspects of schools impact and external results are only one such measure.

**Q8 Please could you give a few particular examples of good and bad marking and feedback that you have seen in maths lessons and primary and secondary level?**

Some schools have policies requiring written teacher-student 'dialogue' post-marking but inspectors don't expect to see this.

Please refer to <http://mrreddy.com/blog/2014/10/ofsted-does-not-expect-myth-busting-doc-from-schools-watchdog/>

Marking has to be manageable.

**Q9 How do we record the mathematical conversations that take place when developing depth or an individual student's work during group work?**

Ofsted doesn't expect oral exchanges to be recorded so record only if useful to you/the pupil/the pupil's parents.

Please see the 'Clarification for schools' document: <http://mrreddy.com/blog/2014/10/ofsted-does-not-expect-myth-busting-doc-from-schools-watchdog/>

**Q10 Please define 'intelligent practice'**

Intelligent Practice is practice that exposes structures or relationships or concepts that underpin what children are learning. Introduce subtle changes to questions.

If you can shuffle the order of questions and they don't change in difficulty then that's not IP.

**Q11 Getting 'stuck' is a key part of problem solving and rich tasks. If students do become stuck during an observation, how will Ofsted view this? This is an important part of problem solving but could (wrongly) look like little progress is being made.**

Getting 'stuck' is part of learning maths. 'Good getting stuck' means further thinking takes place. It's not ok though if the teacher leaves the pupils 'stuck' for the rest of the lesson.

There is a temptation during inspections for teachers or an additional adult to intervene too quickly. Consider asking skilful question to help overcome the 'stuckness'.

**Q12 How can we show progress through grades with the new number grading system when we don't fully understand what the numbers mean?**

Schools use different systems for assessing their pupils, which they need to be able to explain to inspectors. Inspectors check from first hand evidence in the school that it agrees with what school tells the inspectors. In short: design your curriculum, design your underpinning assessment system within your curriculum, know what you are assessing and why, and be able to explain it.

**Q13 Given that Ofsted have taken the welcome step to move away from a prescriptive framework, how do you ensure there is no inconsistency in approach in terms of criteria for measurement? Can the goalposts move depending on your inspector?**

The handbook gives many prompts for inspectors to look at. During inspection team meetings, school's SLT is part of the discussion about emerging evidence so they have the opportunity to inform Ofsted's collective judgement.

While inspectors will NOT have set things they are 'looking for' in maths, there is a reciprocal responsibility from the school to ensure they are talking to inspectors to explain what is expected by the school.

Schools should have real clarity about what they're doing in maths and be able to explain that to inspectors so that they understand the school's systems better.

Ofsted's QA systems are improving, inspectors are coming in-house and a new complaints panel is being set up. Don't be afraid to talk to the inspectors!

**Q14 How much "evidence of progress" do Ofsted inspectors look for in books - does everything children do every lesson need to be recorded in some way, e.g. by photographs?**

No - schools should record what they think is useful for their pupils' learning.

**Q15 I notice in the new OFSTED framework "inspectors will give most weight to the progress of pupils currently in the school rather than attainment and nationally published data". Given that "levels are going", how is this progress measured?**

Schools will use different systems for assessing their pupils, which they need to be able to explain to inspectors. Inspectors check from first hand evidence in the school that it agrees with what school tells the inspectors. In short: design your curriculum, design your underpinning assessment system within your curriculum (and know what you are expecting from pupils at different stages), know what you are assessing and why, and be able to explain it.

**Q16 Will Ofsted take into account the fact that the current year 9 have not been subject to the new KS2/3 etc and so there are gaps that need to be filled? What measures to fill identify these gaps are considered good practices?**

Yes it will be taken into account. Up to the school to identify. Important that schools do it though.

**Q17 If a teacher has time to stick in photographs and write lots of "dialogic feedback", OR time to plan a lesson in depth with questions that reflect intelligent practice and variation which should they do?**

Do what makes the most difference to your pupils' learning.

**Q18 How can teachers ensure they push on the rapid achievers in a Mastery curriculum?**

Go deeper with the right challenge and complexity of problems for those pupils.

**Q19 Most people have heard the statement "but in maths xxx policy doesn't work" ... in what ways does inspections in maths differ to other subjects?**

The School Inspection Handbook reflects the things Ofsted consider in the teaching and learning of maths. There is nothing wrong with Maths being different so long as the school's policies reflect this and the school knows what it is expecting from different subjects.

**Q20 What key advice would you give to schools looking to adopt a Mastery approach with mixed aged classes please?**

It is more complicated. Schools with mixed aged classes are trying out different approaches. One of these is to 'split-teach'. Others are meshing schemes.

Schools are thinking about the best solution for their context.

**Q21 My school doesn't have a mastery curriculum or a mastery approach. Will that affect our grading?**

No it won't affect grading because we look at the impact of the whole provision (of which SoW is a part, but doesn't need to be tagged as mastery).

Just because they don't use the title mastery, doesn't mean pupils don't flourish in their school.

**Q22 Should setting be used in KS3 classes?**

This is entirely up to the school. It should monitor the impact of decisions around setting, or not setting, on pupils' learning and achievement.

**Q23 What importance does OFSTED place on the classroom environment? Not just in terms of tidiness but also wall displays etc - any advice on the "ideal" learning environment?**

Other than pupils behaving well and being able to learn well in it, there is no 'ideal classroom environment'.

**Q24 How much does presentation matter in student's book work?**

At the point where it has an impact on learning.

Mathematical presentation is more important than neatness.

**Q25 Should setting be used in primary schools?**

Up to the school to decide and then monitor and gauge the impact of that decision on pupils' learning and achievement.

**Q26 Why should schools start adopting a mastery approach?**

If the aims chime with the needs of your children then you might want to adopt a mastery approach.

Please refer to NCETM's document on the characteristics of a mastery approach in maths:

[https://www.ncetm.org.uk/public/files/19990433/Developing\\_mastery\\_in\\_mathematics\\_october\\_2014.pdf](https://www.ncetm.org.uk/public/files/19990433/Developing_mastery_in_mathematics_october_2014.pdf)

**Q27 In the world without levels, many tracking systems still focus on showing progress by accelerating children through the content. Could Ofsted offer more advice to schools about tracking when using a mastery approach?**

The advice is to consider how your monitoring systems may capture deeper learning (including reasoning & problem-solving) as well as content coverage. It's up to the school to determine these systems. Where they're using a mastery approach that focuses on depth rather than acceleration then ideally the monitoring system would capture that depth.

**Q28 "Do leaders insist that children should have good materials to work with, including textbooks?"**

**Is Ofsted suggesting here that they will be looking for the use of textbooks? How does this fit with "We don't tell teachers how to teach anymore"?**

Pupils should have good materials to work with, which may or may not mean textbooks. It's up to the school and teachers. Inspectors are not looking for textbooks specifically, but will be critical if learning materials are poor.

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