

Ofsted's generic grade descriptors and draft supplementary subject-specific guidance for inspectors on making judgements during subject survey visits to schools

Response by Mathematics in Education and Industry (MEI)

MEI welcomes Ofsted's guidance for inspectors of Mathematics. This guidance, along with the Ofsted publication 'Mathematics: understanding the score', gives a clear message to those involved in mathematics education that it is independent mathematical thinking by students that is most important and valued, rather than teaching to the test.

In each of the four categories below, the guidance for 'Outstanding' practice can be interpreted to cover all important features of such provision; further clarity could be provided by specific examples, such as those given in 'Mathematics: understanding the score'.

The way in which the descriptors change from 'Outstanding' to 'Good', 'Satisfactory' and then 'Inadequate' is clear and appropriate.

Achievement in Mathematics

We are pleased to see that the guidance has an emphasis on mathematical concepts and connections within mathematics and places importance on students' perseverance and accuracy. We agree that pupils using 'techniques correctly, often through emulating the teacher's methods' is, on its own, at best 'satisfactory'.

Quality of teaching in Mathematics

Learning is most effective when students build on already secure mathematical concepts, understanding how new ideas are natural extensions of familiar concepts. Good teachers have evidence of students' starting points through careful questioning and by listening to students articulate their understanding. The 'Outstanding' descriptors are consistent with this view. We agree that 'a wide range of teaching strategies' is important. We think that 'use of multiple representations' should be explicitly included in the 'Outstanding' and 'Good' descriptors.

The curriculum in Mathematics

Some students enjoy mathematics as an intellectual pursuit in its own right; others place more value on its applications. We believe that this should be mentioned alongside 'the full range of pupils' needs and interests'. In addition, it should be stated that an 'Outstanding' curriculum gives students an appreciation of mathematical proof and that 'Outstanding', 'Good' and 'Satisfactory' all show evidence that students encounter applications of mathematics that are meaningful to them.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in Mathematics

We agree that subject leaders should 'secure high quality professional development in the subject' and, as stated under the 'Quality of teaching in Mathematics' section, that teachers' mathematical subject knowledge and pedagogical subject knowledge are both crucial to effective teaching. We would encourage Ofsted to promote CPD that explicitly addresses both of these aspects.

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