

Ofsted Preparation Guide: Secondary Maths

A step-by-step maths framework to help plan and prepare for your next inspection, including common maths deep dive questions

SLT Guides



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Introduction

This resource has been designed for Heads of Department, TLR holders and SLT in secondary schools.

Since the introduction of the 2019 Ofsted Education Inspection Framework, the way schools are inspected has changed and it can be difficult to keep up with what Ofsted will or won't require from you.

Why we've made this resource

Every week, we speak with secondary school maths teachers, Head of Maths and SLT who are looking to raise maths attainment in their schools with our maths intervention programmes.

Many of them tell us about the feedback they've received from Ofsted or the changes they're looking to make to ensure their maths provision is as effective as possible.

We know from all of these many conversations (and our own experiences as former teachers!) that preparing for Ofsted can be a challenging and daunting time. That's why we've gathered all the key information you'll need regarding the teaching of maths here, in one place.

Armed with this guide, you can embark on your next inspection and any Ofsted deep dive in maths with confidence.

Throughout this guide, remember that Ofsted are not trying to catch you out. They want to know what is happening in the school as a whole, the vision for the school and the steps in place to achieve the vision.



If you're looking for more general guidance regarding the Ofsted Framework that's been in place since 2019 including recommendations on designing and developing your curriculum:

Read: all articles on Ofsted¹



The Ofsted Inspection Framework explained

Ofsted are always looking to develop the way they evaluate schools. Most notably in 2019, new guidance introduced the idea of subject deep dives. These deep dives are in-depth investigations into a selection of subjects, of which maths is one of the most common - in 2022/23, 77% of secondary inspections included a deep dive in Maths.

In this guide, we have compiled the key facts that you as a Head of Department need to know about the current Ofsted framework and the approach Ofsted now takes to inspections.

When will inspections take place?

The Ofsted handbook states that inspections can take place at any point from five school days after the first day pupils attend in autumn term. Ofsted will normally contact the school by telephone between 9:30am and 2pm on the school day before the inspection.

During the informing phone call, Ofsted will speak with the headteacher (or, if they are unavailable, the next most senior member of staff) to confirm basic information about the school and have a general discussion about the school.

The handbook notes that Ofsted may conduct inspections without notice. At these times, a lead inspector will contact the school about 15 minutes before arriving on site.

Key judgement categories

As of September 2024, Ofsted is scrapping single-word headline judgements. Ofsted found less than four in 10 parents and 29% of teachers supported single-word judgements and now recognises that single-word judgements aren't working for parents or schools.

In a bid to raise educational standards, Ofsted is set to introduce report cards in September 2025 to provide a more in-depth and broader picture of school performance.

Currently, these are the four judgement categories (plus a fifth, where relevant of 'early years provision'):

- Quality of education
- Behaviour and attitudes
- Personal development
- Leadership and management



One word judgements will still be awarded for each of the four current judgement areas for schools:

- Outstanding
- Good
- Requires Improvement
- Inadequate

Quality of education

Quality of education is a key focus for many teachers. This category includes deep dives and the three I's: Intent, Implementation, Impact.

- Intent: the extent to which you are aiming for a rich, broad and balanced curriculum
- Implementation: how the curriculum is enacted and the quality of teaching and support for staff
- ✓ **Impact:** whether pupils have developed the knowledge and skills that the curriculum was designed to equip them with and how the school knows this

Ofsted want schools to have high and equal expectations for pupils and provide an ambitious, knowledge-rich curriculum. Throughout the framework, it is clear that the curriculum should be broad and balanced, provide a wide range of subjects and be well sequenced.

There is no longer an expectation from staff that hundreds of different data points will be used as part of the inspection material. Ofsted have stated that their interest is in how individual schools assess and understand the impact of their curriculum; if data is a part of that, they will look at it, but it is no longer central to Ofsted's requirements during a visit.

Curriculum intent

The inspectors will spend a lot of time discussing the curriculum intent with senior and subject leaders. This will focus on endpoints, specific and appropriate content and the sequencing of the content. The key messages from the handbook are that the curriculum:

- Must be broad and balanced
- Should provide a wide range of subjects throughout Years 7 to 9
- Should (where applicable) have the ambition of meeting the government's target for 90% of Year 10 pupils in state-funded mainstream schools studying EBacc subjects by 2025
- Should be coherent and well sequenced, with knowledge, skills and cultural capital all playing an integral part



Curriculum implementation

The overall aim of 'implementation' is to see how staff implement the curriculum.

As with intent, inspectors draw evidence regarding implementation from discussions. These discussions will be with curriculum and subject leaders as well as teachers. The inspectors will also observe pupils and conduct interviews with a group of pupils or classes as well as scrutinising work and curriculum planning. Note that Ofsted does not require this to be in a specific format and does not request individual lesson plans.

Inspectors do not focus on one specific type of evidence, instead they will be looking for connections between evidence to demonstrate the overall quality of education on offer.

Curriculum impact

Inspectors do not use schools' internal assessment data as evidence. They only look at nationally generated performance data.

Inspectors will also draw evidence together from interviews, discussions (with staff and pupils), observations, work scrutinies, as well as the nationally published information. In primary schools, there is also a focus on listening to a range of pupils read.

How Ofsted asses 'Quality of education'

There are three main stages to this:

- **▼ Top-level view:** Ofsted inspectors will start by meeting leaders. They will explore the school's curriculum with specific focuses on what the curriculum offers pupils and how it is sequenced. They will also discuss the reasoning for these choices.
- Deep dive: After this initial discussion, inspectors will select subjects to be the focus of a 'deep dive'. They will gather evidence on the specific curriculum intent, implementation and impact. These deep dives will typically focus on 4 to 6 subjects at secondary level. Subject leaders will be involved with this along with other teachers and pupils. More information on deep dives can be found on page 17.
- Bringing it together: Inspectors will then gather all the information together and discuss any further information they may need.



Behaviour and attitudes

Inspectors will hold discussions with pupils from a range of backgrounds and experience, as well as staff (particularly trainees, supply staff, ECTs, administrative support staff and catering staff). They will also use information from pupil and staff surveys and observations. Pulling these together, they evaluate a range of factors:

- How calm and orderly the environment is
- The setting of clear routines and expectations of behaviour in the whole school, not just the classroom
- Attendance and punctuality
- Clear and effective behaviour and attendance policies with clearly defined consequences that are followed and understood by all
- Pupils' motivation and positive attitudes to learning as predictors of attainment
- A positive and respectful school culture
- An environment where pupils feel safe

Personal development

The inspectors are looking for:

- The range, quality and take-up of extra-curricular activities
- The promotion of British Values, both through the curriculum and wider opportunities such as assemblies or visits
- ✓ How the curriculum (specifically subjects such as RE, PSHE, citizenship and RSHE) contributes to pupils' personal development
- Development of pupils' character
- Quality of debate and discussions that pupils have
- Pupils' understanding of how equality and diversity are promoted and celebrated
- The quality of careers information, education, advice and guidance (CIEAG) provision, in line with statutory requirements for secondary schools



Leadership and management

Inspectors will meet with leaders (this could also involve senior MAT members of staff if the school is a part of a MAT) to discuss the school and to conduct meetings with governors and interviews with staff and pupils. They will also look at responses to staff, pupil and parent questionnaires.

The important factors include:

- Leaders set high expectations of pupils and these are demonstrated everyday by staff
- The extent to which leaders understand the education provided in the school
- How aligned CPD is with the curriculum and how content knowledge is developed over time
- How coherent and consistent teaching and expectations are across the school
- How leaders engage parents and the community
- The extent to which leaders take into account the workload and well-being of their staff

The framework has a section within leadership and management specifically outlining expectations regarding 'gaming'. Ofsted have clearly stated that inspectors will challenge leaders and managers about any unusual patterns that appear to 'game the system'. This could, for example, involve pupils being entered for courses that are not in their best interests or unusual attendance records.

Other areas of note

- ✓ There is a greater focus on distinct phases (particularly Sixth Form). These phases are given separate grades as part of inspections carried out.
- Independent schools (such as faith schools and performing arts schools) are judged primarily on the non-specialist core element of the curriculum. In instances where non-specialist areas of the curriculum are limited, inspectors instead consider how the core curriculum has been integrated within the specialist curriculum more broadly.

For a summary of the whole Ofsted framework that came into effect in 2019, see 'An SLT Summary of the Ofsted Framework 2019' from Third Space Learning.

The Ofsted inspection handbook³ can be found on the gov.uk website.





Ofsted framework and maths

Now that you have an understanding of the Ofsted framework, we can move on to consider the aspects of the EIF and the handbook that specifically apply to maths.

Applying the EIF to the teaching of maths

The following is from the 2023 edition of the Ofsted Inspection Handbook

- When inspectors look at mathematics, they will evaluate the quality of a school's mathematics education through lesson visits, discussions with pupils and scrutiny of their work, discussions with subject leaders, and examining any published data. This will include understanding how mathematics is taught remotely, where applicable.
- Inspectors will consider what steps the school has taken to ensure that:
 - Pupils understand and remember the mathematical knowledge, concepts and procedures appropriate for their starting points, including knowledge of efficient algorithms. This should also ensure that pupils are ready for the next stage, whether that is the next lesson, unit of work, year or key stage, including post-16 mathematics.
 - The school's curriculum planning for mathematics carefully sequences knowledge, concepts and procedures to build mathematical knowledge and skills systematically and, over time, the curriculum draws connections across different ways of looking at mathematical ideas.
 - The curriculum divides new material into manageable steps lesson by lesson.
 - The school's curriculum identifies opportunities when mathematical reasoning and solving
 problems will allow pupils to make useful connections between identified mathematical
 ideas or to anticipate practical problems they are likely to encounter in adult life. Pupils have
 sufficient understanding of, and unconscious competence in, prerequisite mathematical
 knowledge, concepts and procedures that are necessary to succeed in the specific tasks
 set.
 - Within the curriculum, there are sufficient opportunities planned to revisit previously learned knowledge, concepts and procedures; this is to ensure that, once learned, mathematical knowledge becomes deeply embedded in pupils' memories. This then allows rapid and accurate recall and frees pupils' attention so they can work with increasing independence, apply their mathematical knowledge to more complex concepts, procedures and opportunities for problem-solving, and gain enjoyment through a growing self-confidence in their ability.



- There is flexibility in curriculum planning so that the school can address identified gaps in pupils' mathematical knowledge that hinder their capacity to learn and apply new content.
 Those pupils behind age-related expectations are provided with the opportunities to learn the mathematical knowledge and skills necessary to catch up with their peers.
- There are objective assessments that can identify when all pupils have gained the intended understanding and unconscious competence in knowledge, concepts and procedures necessary before they move on to new or more complex content.
- Teaching models new procedures and uses resources and approaches that enable pupils to understand the mathematics they are learning.
- All teachers of mathematics, including non-specialist teachers of mathematics, have sufficient mathematical and teaching content knowledge to deliver topics effectively.
- Pupils' mathematical knowledge is developed and used, where appropriate, across the curriculum.



A deep dive in maths

At secondary level, inspectors typically select between 4 and 6 subjects to carry out deep dives. In 2022/23, 77% of secondary inspections included a deep dive in maths - so if you are a maths subject leader, it is important that you are prepared for this prospect.

Deep dive process

Inspectors will usually begin with a discussion with the Head of Department about their maths curriculum, focusing on the three I's (intent, implementation and impact). This will include discussion of long-term and medium-term plans and reasoning why the curriculum has been chosen.

After these discussions, they may conduct lesson sampling followed by work or book scrutiny from pupils who will be (or have been) observed. They may also want to conduct discussions with subject teachers about the maths curriculum and with pupils about lessons they have observed. Pupil selection is likely to include children from particular subgroups, such as pupil premium or SEND.

As a subject leader, you need to know how and why you teach maths as you do in the school, and how you know the maths curriculum is effective.

Observations

Lesson observations can be a daunting prospect. There are several things to know about observations when considering this part of an Ofsted inspection.

- Inspectors want to know the context of the lesson they are observing or the book they are looking at. They understand learning is a journey and want to know how the children got to the point they are. A conversation with teachers or subject leader could from part of this process.
- Heads of Department and subject teachers should know individual lessons are not being judged.
- Work scrutinies are important; they evidence what has been covered in maths and how. This will prove what you have already said is happening in the curriculum.

Ofsted deep dive questions

At the end of this document we have included a copy of the most common questions that you are likely to encounter as a subject leader during an Ofsted deep dive. A conversation with teachers or subject leader could from part of this process.



What inspectors are trained to look for: Ofsted crib sheets

In the autumn term of 2022, teachers on social media began circulating Ofsted Inspector training materials. These were not initially designed to be read by the wider public or to inform schools' decision-making, so no one can guarantee their accuracy and legitimacy. However, they can be a useful resource to use in conjunction with the EIF.

The Ofsted crib sheets include the following two documents:

- Maths Guidance Notes
- Maths Aide Memoire

There are separate versions for primary and secondary differing only by key stage specific examples.

Expectations from schools

Ofsted makes the following caveats:

- Schools are not expected to articulate their intent as is outlined in the document
- Schools are not expected to provide documents to act as evidence in the areas outlined
- Inspectors are instructed to investigate any issues outside of the school's control that may be affecting the education of their pupils
- Schools should have already identified these issues and taken steps to mitigate their effects

Maths crib sheet: focus areas for inspectors

The mathematics crib sheet identifies six focus areas for inspectors.

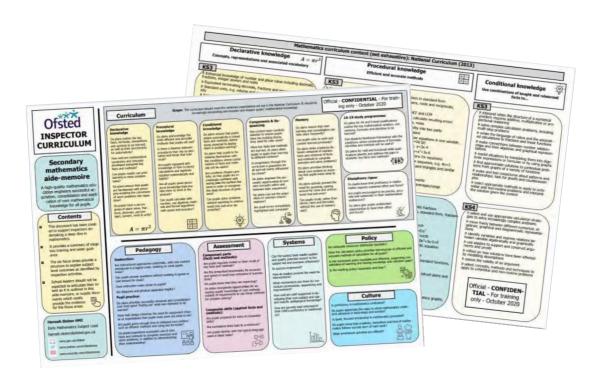
- 1 The schools' understanding of **progress in mathematics** and how that informs its **approach to the** curriculum
- 2 The extent to which teaching supports the goals of the mathematics curriculum
- 3 The effectiveness of assessment
- The extent to which there is a climate of high subject expectations where a love of maths can flourish
- 5 The quality of systems and support for staff development
- 6 The extent to which whole school policies affect the capacity for effective mathematics education





It's worth looking at these Crib Sheets in detail for an understanding of what inspectors will be thinking about: Ofsted Crib Sheets Explainer: Training Guides For Ofsted Inspectors Now Free For All Schools⁴

11 min read



Ofsted Maths Aide Memoire page 1 and 2 for Secondary schools.



Ofsted Research Review

The crib sheets borrow heavily from the Ofsted Research Review for Maths published in 2021. This document explicitly establishes Ofsted's expectations and understanding of what a good curriculum looks like - and, more controversially - what good teaching or pedagogy looks like.

***** THIRD SPACE** LEARNING

Ofsted Maths Research Review 2021

7 of the most important factors that we've drawn from the research findings.

- 1 Foundational success in maths underpins maths positivity and leads to improved results.
- 4 Striving for equity in your curriculum means better outcomes for all.
- 2 Early curriculum emphasis on core facts and concepts is key to closing the gaps in knowledge.
- **5** Teach problem solving explicitly and in context.
- **3** Sequence new learning so it builds on strong foundations.
- 6 Look at the quality and quantity of topic consolidation and low stakes assessments.

School-wide systems are best for pupil progress and teacher development.

Key terminology

Before your next inspection, you should be familiar with the following terminology and research around how a curriculum is sequenced and how how children learn:

- Declarative knowledge Information that is factual and can be explicitly stated, such as facts, concepts, and principles.
- Procedural knowledge Knowledge about how to do something, involving sequences of steps or processes. It is often associated with skills and strategies.
- Conditional knowledge Understanding the conditions under which to apply declarative and procedural knowledge effectively, adapting to different contexts.
- Adaptive teaching and learning Tailoring instructional methods and approaches to individual learners or groups, taking into account their needs, preferences, and progress.



- Explicit instruction Clear and direct teaching that provides detailed explanations, examples, and guidance to help learners acquire new knowledge or skills.
- Intelligent variation Systematically varying instructional tasks or materials to promote deeper understanding and transfer of knowledge by challenging learners in meaningful ways.
- Retrieval practice The act of recalling information from memory, often through quizzes, tests, or other activities, to strengthen long-term retention.
- Task design Planning and creating learning activities or assignments with specific goals in mind, considering the content, skills, and desired outcomes.
- Scaffolding Providing temporary support or guidance to learners as they engage in a new task or concept, with the intention of gradually reducing the support as independence increases.

We also recommend that you are clear on your approach to textbooks and assessment - both the purpose and methods that you use.



Read more on Ofsted's findings from research literature here: <u>Teachers' Guide To The Ofsted Maths Research Review 2021</u>⁵

8 min read



Ofsted maths subject report

Following the publication of the research review, in 2023 Ofsted also published examples of stronger and weaker maths practice in 50 schools.

Their main findings for secondary schools were relatively positive. These are some of the themes they identified:

- 1 There has been a positive shift in the quality of mathematics education over the last few years.
- 2 Schools are accessing support from Maths Hubs and other professional networks more frequently to disseminate good practice.
- Curriculum planning has improved considerably; however, there remains a concern around the degree to with external examinations or accountability measures drive curriculum decisions, particularly in KS4.
- Completing the course is sometimes prioritised over ensuring pupils are learning at an appropriate pace for their current level of attainment.
- 5 Problem-solving is an area of weakness. Not all pupils have the opportunity to access problem-solving work, and problem-solving is not always explicitly embedded into the chosen curriculum.
- 6 Retrieval practice is generally being used effectively, but teachers should ensure that any misconceptions highlighted during this work are then addressed.
- 7 Internal assessment data should not be the sole or primary means of identifying pupils for intervention.
- 8 Recruitment and retention of specialists is recognised as a major issue, particularly at secondary level. Additional support and/or subject-specific CPD should be in place for non-specialist teachers.



12 min read

Read more: <u>Ofsted Mathematics Subject Report: Coordinating</u> Mathematical Success⁶

Coordinating mathematical success: the mathematics subject report⁷





Guide to Choosing Your

Maths Scheme of Work⁹

THIRD SPACE MATHS HUB

Final preparation

Now you know what to expect from an Ofsted inspection under the EIF, and what a deep dive in maths is likely to involve, this is what we recommend as the essential steps of final preparation.

1 Make sure you've **read, reviewed and know the key school documents well** that relate to your subject. These may include:

- Maths Policy
- Calculation Policy
- Curriculum or Teaching and Learning Policy
- Maths Improvement Plan and/ or School Improvement Plan
- Homework or Home Learning Policy
- Understand what the National Curriculum says about teaching maths in Key Stages 3, 4 and 5 (if applicable) and how your scheme of work breaks this down.
- 3 Take a look at Ofsted's own publications regarding the teaching and inspecting of maths as set out on the previous pages:
 - The Mathematics Research Review (2021)
 - Ofsted Crib Sheets (2022)
 - Ofsted Mathematics Subject Report: Coordinating Mathematical Success (2023)
- If you can, **complete a full audit of your school's maths provision.** Although this can be be a very intensive process it is extremely useful. By auditing, you will begin to develop a clearer picture of areas of strength and development.

Auditing may involve:

- Considering the vision you have of maths in your school.
- Monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning, including CPD required for staff.
- Evaluating the maths curriculum, especially considering how it aligns with a mastery approach.

A step by step process to conducting a maths audit in your school is set out in the Third Space Learning Secondary Maths Subject Leader Toolkit¹⁰.

- 5 Evaluate your departmental assessment data and consider the following:
 - Trends that can be identified in the data. This could be general trends within year groups or very specific groups such as summer born children in a single year group.
 - Trends with pupil premium and SEND children and how they are being supported to make accelerated progress, particularly in the aftermath of Covid-19 and school closures.





- ✓ Trends with double disadvantaged children (pupil premium and SEND children). Ofsted are not as focused on data as they once were. However, they will want to know you have identified trends in the data and are monitoring this.
- **Review staff competencies in teaching maths** and any challenges there may be. This includes being aware of the needs of non-specialists or newer teachers in your department, and considering how to support development of subject-specific pedagogy.
- As a result of your findings, **start planning the CPD requirements** for individuals and for the whole department. This is crucial both in terms of staff development and wellbeing, but also if you want to influence learning outcomes.
- Revise your action plan or improvement plan for maths. After considering all of the points above, you should be ready to collate the information into a clear action plan for maths. Action plans involve setting specific objectives for the year and reviewing the success of the objectives regularly. Having an action plan shows an understanding of both where maths currently is in your school and where you intend it to be at the end of the year.

Thousands of free KS3 and GCSE maths resources created by experienced secondary maths teachers to save time, build engagement and raise attainment.

- Comprehensive collections of resources
- Easy to implement alongside your existing scheme of work
- Senior leader guides to support maths teaching and leaderships





Ofsted deep dive questions

1. Schemes of Work/Curriculum

Questions	Discussed	Discussion Notes	RAG
What schemes of work do you follow?			
How do your schemes of work link to the National Curriculum?			
How do class teachers know what was taught in previous years?			
How is your curriculum coverage progressive throughout the school?			
What are the strengths/areas of development in your subject?			
How do you promote British values in your curriculum?			
How do you engage parents in the mathematics curriculum?			



2. Progress

Questions	Discussed	Discussion Notes	RAG
How do you make sure that students who get 'stuck' feel supported in lessons? What is in place for these students?			
What is in place for the students who are stuck?			
How do you fill gaps in maths and decide on maths interventions?			
How do you know this is happening across the department? How do you assess and monitor it?			
How are end of term assessments fed back into teaching and learning?			
How do class teachers know what went before in previous years?			
How do you know there is progression throughout the school? How do you ensure coverage across all year groups?			
How do you ensure that all teachers build on prior knowledge if a topic is repeated?			
How do you ensure that students are prepared for post-16 education?			



3. Interventions

Questions	Discussed	Discussion Notes	RAG
What interventions are carried out in school?			
How are gaps in learning filled?			
How are pupils/students identified for intervention or additional support?			
What do you do to support students who are struggling?			
Are the staff conducting interventions, subject specialists or support staff?			



4. CPD Provision

Questions	Discussed	Discussion Notes	RAG
What CPD provision do you have for staff?			
How do you support new staff?			
How do you support non-specialists?			
What CPD have staff had?			
How do you ensure department members have up to date subject knowledge and subject-specific pedagogy?			
What training/support have you received?			



5. Pupil Premium

Questions	Discussed	Discussion Notes	RAG
How do you specifically support students in receipt of pupil premium?			
How do you improve pupils' cultural capital?			
What evidence do you have of the effectiveness of your PP spending?			



6. SEND

Questions	Discussed	Discussion Notes	RAG
How are SEND pupils supported?			
How do you plan to ensure good progress?			
How do you know this is happening across the department?			
How do you assess and monitor it?			
How do you know there is progression throughout the school?			



7. Workload & Well-being

Questions	Discussed	Discussion Notes	RAG
Do you feel supported by senior leaders?			
Do you feel you have been given all the tools you need to do this role?			
What support do you provide in a leadership role to ensure a good work life balance for members of your department?			
How do you support the teachers?			
How do you support new staff?			
What training/support have you received?			



8. Lesson Observations

Questions	Discussed	Discussion Notes	RAG
What will we see in the lesson observation?			
How will the lesson fit in with the overview for the subject and subject areas?			
What would you expect the teaching assistant to be doing during the lesson?			
Is the correct vocabulary being used?			
Does the teacher's questioning encourage learning and enquiry?			
Is the teacher's subject knowledge good?			
Are the children learning new knowledge/ skills?			



9. General Questions for Senior Leaders

Questions	Discussed	Discussion Notes	RAG
What are your strengths and weaknesses?			
Which objectives were embedded and revisited?			
When we walk around, what will we see being taught in maths?			
What support do you provide in a leadership role to ensure a good work life balance for staff?			
What do you do when a new student arrives?			



10. General Questions for Subject Leaders

Questions	Discussed	Discussion Notes	RAG
What links are there between your subject and the rest of the curriculum?			
What resources do you have? Do you feel supported and that you have been given all the tools you need to do this role?			
How do you use the community, trips, visitors in your subject?			
What are the strengths/areas for development in your subject?			
What do staff think of your subject? What do children think of your subject?			
How are gaps bridged between each key stage?			
If all children are using the year group objectives, how do you ensure challenge?			
How do we know where the gaps are?			
How is homework set?			
What's your vision for maths? What aspirations do you have for these children?			



11. General Questions for Students

Questions	Discussed	Discussion Notes	RAG
Do you enjoy maths?			
Are you challenged in maths?			
Do you get help in maths?			
Do you know how to improve?			
What would you change about maths?			



References

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Further reading

Ofsted research review on mathematics education - gov.uk

Ofsted mathematics subject report: coordinating mathematical success - gov.uk

National curriculum in England: mathematics programmes of study - gov.uk

Exemplification of Ready-to-Progress Criteria - NCETM

Improving Mathematics in Key Stages 2 and 3 - EEF

Ofsted Inspection Handbook from 1st September 2023 - gov.uk

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