DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 472 085 CS 511 750

TITLE	Teaching Literacy and Mathematics in Reception Classes: A Survey by HMI.
INSTITUTION	Office for Standards in Education, London (England).
REPORT NO	HMI-330
PUB DATE	2001-10-00
NOTE	18p.; A survey by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI).
AVAILABLE FROM	Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), Alexandra House, 33 Kingsway, London, WC2B 6SE, United Kingdom, England. Tel: 07002 637833; Fax: 07002 693274; e-mail: freepublications@ofsted.gov.uk; Web site: http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications. For full text: http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/ publications/docs/1253.htm.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*British National Curriculum; Curriculum Development; Curriculum Evaluation; Kindergarten; *Literacy; *Mathematics Instruction; Primary Education; *Reading Instruction; Teacher Effectiveness; *Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS	England; *National Literacy Strategy (England)

ABSTRACT

Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) inspected the teaching of literacy and mathematics in the reception year in a sample of 129 schools between autumn 2000 and summer 2001. Most of the schools were designated as primary, teaching children from the age of four or five to eleven. A few schools had nursery classes or units attached to them. In half the schools, HMI focused on literacy, in the other half on mathematics. Each school was inspected by one HMI for one day. Main findings include: (1) the quality of teaching was rarely less than satisfactory and much of it was good; (2) the majority of reception teachers plan effectively for their teaching; (3) the introduction of the foundation stage brought new challenges for schools, but few have established any criteria to judge how well the new curriculum is working; (4) teaching assistants and nursery nurses make a strong contribution to teaching and learning in reception classes; (5) there is a sense of professional isolation among some reception teachers, particularly in schools where there are no other foundation-stage classes and teachers; (6) few headteachers have attended any training for the foundation stage so far and few have seen the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies guidance for the reception year; and (7) just over half the schools had written action plans to help them implement the foundation stage. Findings suggest that now that the foundation stage curriculum is in place in the reception year, schools need to turn their attention to revising their schemes of work so that teachers have a clear, unambiguous framework within which to plan their work over the course of the year. (RS)

OFFICE
FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION

Teaching literacy and mathematics in reception classes: A survey by HMI

Reference number: HMI 330

Contents

Introduction and Evidence Base

▲ CONTENTS

1. The foundation stage for children aged three to five was introduced in September 2000. It is accompanied by `early learning goals' (ELGs) that set out what children should achieve by the end of the reception year, and guidance about how to implement them. It follows two years during which schools have been responding to the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies (NLNS). The two *Frameworks for teaching* (the Frameworks) provide teaching objectives for all year groups from reception to Year 6. At Key Stages 1 and 2, these objectives are taught largely in a literacy hour and a daily mathematics lesson.

2. Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) inspected the teaching of literacy and mathematics in the reception year in a sample of 129 schools between autumn 2000 and summer 2001. Most of the schools were designated as primary, teaching children from the age of four or five to eleven. A few schools had nursery classes or units attached to them. In half the schools, HMI focused on literacy, in the other half on mathematics. Each school was inspected by one HMI for one day. Evidence from other schools visited as part of local education authority (LEA) inspections and from OFSTED section 10 inspections was also taken into account.

3. In the publication, *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage* (OFSTED 2000), it is made clear that `the early learning goals are in line with the objectives in the frameworks for teaching literacy and mathematics, which should be taught throughout the reception year. This guidance helps reception teachers to plan using those objectives in order to meet the needs of the children in their classes.' The guidance is also clear that `reception teachers may choose to cover the elements of the literacy hour and the daily mathematics lesson across the day rather than in a single unit of time. In order to ensure a smooth transition to the literacy hour and daily mathematics lesson in Year 1, both should be in place by the end of the reception year.' Additional guidance issued by the two Strategies (Guidance on the Organisation of the National Literacy Strategy in Reception Classes and Guidance on the Organisation of the Daily Mathematics Lesson in Reception Classes, DfEE, 2000) for headteachers and teachers working in reception classes provided very useful supplements to that already published in the two Frameworks. Most children are expected to achieve the early learning goals by the end of the foundation stage.

4. The literacy hour includes word, sentence and text level work. Teachers use a balance of different teaching approaches, such as shared reading and writing with the whole class, guided reading and writing with groups of pupils, and independent activities. The lesson usually finishes with a whole-class plenary to reinforce the teaching objectives. The three-part daily mathematics lesson comprises an oral/mental session, a main teaching activity and a plenary.

Main Findings

CONTENTS

5. The inspection evidence gives an encouraging picture of the curriculum and teaching in reception classes during the year in which the foundation-stage curriculum was introduced. The quality of teaching of literacy and mathematics is rarely less than satisfactory and much of it is good. The majority of reception class teachers have a good understanding of what to teach and how to teach it in ways which engage the interest of young children.

6. The majority of reception teachers plan effectively for their teaching of literacy and

mathematics. Most use the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage* and refer to the detailed teaching objectives in the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies Frameworks.

7. The introduction of the foundation stage has brought new challenges for schools, but few have established any criteria by which to judge how well the new curriculum, and its relationship with the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, are working.

8. Most reception teachers recognise the importance of preparing children properly for Year 1, giving them sufficient experience of the full literacy hour and the daily mathematics lesson. By the middle of the summer term, the majority of teachers had brought the elements together in daily lessons. A small minority of teachers failed to bring the elements together before the end of the summer term.

9. Most teachers have a good knowledge of the attainment of the children in their classes and use it effectively to plan further work. The majority of teachers make appropriate use of baseline assessment to group children with similar levels of attainment, plan suitable activities and, in some instances, set curricular targets. Virtually all teachers keep some records of children's progress, for example in phonics, but there are few reception classes with detailed, yet manageable, assessment and record-keeping procedures.

10. Teaching assistants and nursery nurses make a strong contribution to teaching and learning in reception classes. Their impact is particularly strong in mixed-age classes and where children enter reception at different points over the year.

11. There is a sense of professional isolation amongst some reception teachers, particularly in schools where there are no other foundation-stage classes and teachers with whom to discuss problems or share ideas. Many reception teachers, understandably, still identify more with Key Stage 1 than with the foundation stage, particularly where the reception teacher also has management responsibilities in Key Stages 1 or 2.

12. Training led by LEAs for teachers in the foundation stage was most effective when LEA foundation stage teams worked in close co-operation with NLNS consultants. Where this occurred, the trainers presented well-considered, coherent messages about how to teach the elements of the literacy hour and the daily mathematics lesson, and when best to bring these elements together in a continuous, daily lesson. Some teachers, however, had received no training for the foundation stage by the end of the first year of implementation.

13. Few headteachers have attended any training for the foundation stage so far and few have seen the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies guidance for the reception year. The majority of headteachers are not, therefore, in a good position to support and advise their reception teachers about how best to implement the foundation stage and follow the guidance of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies.

14. As the year progressed, well-organised LEAs issued helpful planning booklets in which the early learning goals were mapped against the detailed teaching objectives in the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies Frameworks. Many reception teachers, however, had not received such useful guidance, nor copies of the advice for reception teachers issued by the two Strategies. Few schools had revised their schemes of work in line with the foundation stage in order to incorporate, for example, those aspects of language and literacy, such as speaking and listening, role-play and drama, which are not included in the National Literacy Strategy Framework.

15. Just over half the schools had written action plans to help them implement the

foundation stage. Only a quarter of the plans that were produced, however, had enough detail to be useful. Very few of the plans described how communication, language and literacy and mathematics were to be developed, or how the children would be prepared for Year 1. The plans rarely included curricular targets.

Points for Action

CONTENTS

16. To build on the progress which has already been made in the reception year:

Those with responsibility for the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and for the foundation stage should:

- continue to give unambiguous guidance, in training and in publications, about the place of the two Strategies in the context of the foundation stage.

LEAs should:

- ensure that reception teachers, co-ordinators and headteachers receive consistent advice from National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy consultants and LEA foundation stage teams about how to plan, teach, assess and evaluate the elements of the literacy hour and the daily mathematics lesson in the reception year;

Schools should:

- revise their schemes of work for the reception year and ensure they are in line with the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage*, incorporating the recommendations for teaching and learning in the frameworks for teaching of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies;
- ensure that pupils have sufficient experience of full literacy hours and daily mathematics lessons before they enter Year 1;
- evaluate the impact of the new curriculum on teaching and learning, and its relationship with the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies.

Teaching of Literacy

CONTENTS

Organisation of the curriculum

17. Teachers of reception classes usually introduced the elements of the literacy hour gradually over the second half of the autumn term, following the completion of baseline assessments. By the end of the autumn term, most teachers were doing shared reading regularly with their classes, using `big books', although not always daily. The majority also taught phonics, but these were not always daily, `stand alone' sessions as recommended

by the NLS Framework.

18. Foundation-stage training, and the point in the year at which it took place, influenced when teachers brought together the different elements of the literacy hour, and resulted in some complex patterns of organisation. For example, there were some teachers who taught the different elements of the literacy hour separately in the spring and summer terms, but who had already taught a full daily literacy hour earlier in the year. Even where the other elements were brought together in a single literacy lesson, guided reading was often taught separately. In these classes, each group of children had the attention of the teacher for both guided reading and guided writing each week. By the summer half term, about four fifths of the teachers had brought together most of the elements of the literacy lesson into a daily hour. A small minority of teachers, however, failed to bring the elements together before the end of the summer term, despite clear published guidance about the need to prepare pupils in this way for Year 1.

19. In mixed-age classes, teachers usually taught the full literacy hour daily from the beginning of the autumn term, providing effectively for reception pupils through careful planning and judicious use of teaching assistants. In some of these classes, reception children were introduced gradually to the literacy hour after a settling-in period.

Quality of Teaching of the Literacy Hour

CONTENTS

20. Data from section 10 inspections carried out during the year showed that more good lessons in literacy were taught in reception than in any other year group except Year 6. The teaching of classes which included reception and at least one other year group was weaker than that in single-age reception classes.

Shared reading and writing

21. The teaching of shared reading and writing was good in nearly three quarters of the sessions. The proportion of good teaching rose to over four fifths in the summer term when there was very little unsatisfactory teaching of reading and none of writing.

22. Teachers made good use of shared reading techniques when they read `big books' with the children joining in, or demonstrated reading for the children, including an emphasis on the conventions of print, such as reading from left to right. In this way, the children became familiar with printed materials, particularly books, and associated them with meaning and enjoyment. Shared reading often led effectively into shared writing, with the text which had been read providing ideas for the writing. Teachers wrote using the children's suggestions and, less frequently, their own ideas.

> *In an inner city school with high levels of social disadvantage, a reception class teacher used a `big book' effectively with the children to introduce the idea of letter writing. She began by re-reading part of the shared text `Dear Zoo' to remind the pupils of the story. The children joined in with the reading, then were asked to re-tell the story in sequence. The teacher introduced a letter-writing task by reading a letter she had written. As the children suggested ideas for their own letter, the teacher wrote them on the flip chart, using a writing-frame, asking the children to spell known words and encouraging them to try to spell some unknown ones using*

their phonic knowledge and segmentation skills.

23. In the good lessons, teachers were able to engage children of different ages and abilities through carefully chosen materials, good questioning, clear explanations and a good balance between teacher-led activity and tasks where the children worked independently or with others.

The teacher of a mixed-age reception/Year 1 class in a small school in a disadvantaged rural area began the session with a brisk re-visiting of a fiction book read the day before, `Frog and Toad'. Good questioning involved both age-groups and elicited from them how they recognised a fiction book. A non-fiction book, `Animals Grow', was introduced and pupils were helped to look for clues to identify how it differed from the fiction book. Shared reading was managed well. The teacher used a pointer to help the children follow the text as she read aloud. She gave clear explanations, made links to other lessons and asked a large number of questions to draw most children into the discussion. All pupils were keen to participate in the reading. Following this, the children gave examples to illustrate the differences between fiction and non-fiction books which the teacher, after discussion with them to find the right words, recorded on the whiteboard.

Word level work

24. The teaching of word level work was seldom less than satisfactory and was good in two thirds of the lessons overall. By the summer term, all of the teaching of word level work was at least satisfactory. In the good lessons, the teaching was purposeful and lively, with a good level of interaction between the teacher and the children. Children were taught appropriately to blend phonemes but, overall, there was not enough emphasis on segmenting consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words and, through this, learning to spell them.

In a small rural primary school, a teaching assistant taught phonics to reception pupils. She began by sharing the day's objectives with the children, making good reference to previous work to ensure the pupils had understood. She recapped the initial letter sounds and names of `f', `y', `e', and `k' and moved on briskly to blending CVC words such as `cap', then on to `clasp'. The assistant made very good use of large letters on the whiteboard to illustrate both blending to read and segmenting to spell. Sharp, focused questioning involved all pupils in the activity. The lesson progressed to digraphs `sh' and `th'. Pupils were asked to spell `ash', then to add letters to make `rash' and `crash'. The teaching assistant continued with `th', requiring children to spell `thin' and `thing'. The children were encouraged to move letters around to make new words. They listened carefully and were able to identify sounds at the beginning and ends of words.

25. This is a useful example of the direct interactive teaching of literacy referred to in the guidance provided by the DfES:

Literacy cannot simply be discovered through experience, however richly provided; it has to be taught. Such teaching should be both direct and indirect . . .[Children] need opportunities to experiment with reading and writing but they also need to develop early phonemic awareness, to begin learning how the sounds of spoken language are written down and how letters are carefully formed.

26. A minority of teachers had adopted good commercial schemes of work for phonics which introduced children quickly to almost all the phonemes, teaching them to hear and

say the phonemes in the initial, final and middle positions in words. This prepared the ground for them to blend and segment CVC words independently and helped to give them, early in the reception year, the knowledge and skills needed for reading and writing.

> *In a large primary school in an urban area, all the reception teachers taught 42 phonemes over a period of seven weeks in the autumn term. Children lagging behind the rest of the class were helped to catch up in `snappy' daily sessions in the spring term. The learning was subsequently reinforced and practised. Children were taught to recognise phonemes in the medial and final position, to blend and segment CVC words and to apply their phonic knowledge and skills in their writing.*

27. In the majority of schools, however, the phonemes were not introduced quickly enough, in the mistaken belief that young children need a longer time than that outlined by the strategy to learn them. In this respect, teachers' expectations of the children were too low.

Independent work

28. Independent work was at least satisfactory in nine out of ten lessons and good in five out of ten. Most teachers kept the activities manageable, usually linking them to the earlier text or word level objectives. In the main, activities were practical and suited to the ages and abilities of the children. Many of these sessions incorporated play activities such as role-play or a `writing table'. Where the activities were planned and organised carefully, so that the children could work and play independently, or where there was suitable adult intervention, children's understanding of the uses of literacy and the development of their imagination were good.

> *In an inner city primary school, all children entered school part time in the September after their fourth birthday. Many of the children had attended the school's nursery class, where there was a strong emphasis on literacy, developed in ways appropriate to the ages of the children. Following the daily whole-class shared session using a large text, the children were placed in five groups. By the second half of the autumn term, these were broad ability groups, so that the teacher could work with one or two groups of children with similar abilities each day. On this occasion there was good support from a nursery nurse and a parent helper. On other days, when less help was available, the teacher organised fewer groups. While the teacher concentrated on guided reading, one group worked outside with the nursery nurse to talk about the weather, with an emphasis on speaking and listening, prior to recording their observations in a variety of ways. Another group played in the post office corner, which was set up adjacent to a writing table containing paper and envelopes. A fourth group played a game matching words and pictures, assisted by the parent who emphasised the initial phonemes of the words, while the fifth group worked independently, making cards and writing Christmas lists.*

29. These activities worked well because there was a clear focus for each one, they took account of the adult help available and the children were taught to work and play independently with good levels of concentration.

> *In another school, this time a small one, literacy activities in reception included a music group. The nursery nurse worked with three pupils to re-read `The Bear Hunt' and compose a musical accompaniment. She focused the children well on appropriate interpretation - for instance, what would be the right sort of sound for*

'tiptoeing'. There was a valuable emphasis on the meaning of words, thus expanding the children's vocabulary, and on a personal response to those meanings.

30. Both these examples are very much in accord with the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage* and with the guidance issued by the DfES. They show how well-planned play activities contribute to children's learning in literacy and support their progress towards meeting the early learning goals by the end of the reception year.

31. As the year progressed, many teachers made increasing use of suitable writing frames to guide children in writing independently. The best of these writing frames helped the children to make a start on their writing and supported them as they wrote further. While some required only a few words (but careful thought) from less able pupils, others were constructed so as not to limit what the more able pupils could do.

Guided reading and writing

32. While guided reading was taught well in around three quarters of lessons, guided writing was effective in just over a half. When guided work was taught well, it was a powerful tool for developing children's learning.

In a large, inner-city school, the reception teacher used 'Pip at the Zoo' with a group of children of similar ability. Each child had his or her own copy of the book. The children were given a few minutes to read independently, then they talked about what they had read. The teacher questioned the children well to check their reading skills and comprehension, before helping them to use their phonic knowledge to work out new words. The children then continued reading by themselves, while the teacher checked the accuracy and understanding of the reading of individual pupils.

In a school on a large new housing development on the outskirts of a small town, the teacher guided the writing of seven of the more able reception children, using ideas based on the shared text. Following discussion, in which the teacher helped to shape the children's ideas and the first sentence was decided, each child wrote independently. The teacher remained with the group, giving support as it was needed to compose and write sentences, helping the children to use their knowledge of phonics to spell accurately and keeping an eye on correct letter formation.

33. In the unsatisfactory guided work, the reading or writing activities were not matched well to the children's abilities and, where writing was concerned, the children had too little opportunity to write for themselves.

Plenary sessions

34. The plenary was one of the weaker elements of the literacy teaching and there was sometimes a tendency to omit it, particularly where teachers split the literacy hour into its component parts. Nonetheless, three fifths of the plenary sessions were good. These sessions were used effectively to reinforce and assess learning, summarise key ideas or link the work to that for the next day.

In a suburban primary school, the focus was on alphabetical order. Activities were

designed around the word level work, to support the objective. The plenary consolidated the children's ideas about alphabetical order, through the use of an alphabet book and various games. Another five minutes were given to reinforcing key words. Individual children were chosen to read as many as they could, starting from the bottom of a floor-to-ceiling 'beanstalk' to which cards bearing the words were pinned. At the time, this was a daily occupation. All were keen to take part, to beat their own previous efforts.

In a very small rural school, the eight reception children were in a class alongside Year 1 and Year 2 pupils. A full-time nursery nurse worked with the class teacher. Reception children joined in with shared reading using a carefully chosen text which was open to a range of interpretations (a modern version of a traditional tale), then withdrew with the nursery nurse for their own phonics work. Later on, they rejoined the rest of the class for a plenary. The teacher used the work done by the reception children astutely to revise earlier phonic work for both Year 1 and Year 2 children.

Teaching of Mathematics

CONTENTS

Organisation of the curriculum

35. One third of the teachers introduced the three-part lesson early in the autumn term, although not always daily. Initially, a large proportion of the teachers shortened the teaching time of each session, increasing it as the year progressed. By the summer half term, seven out of eight teachers had brought the elements together in a full daily lesson. During the intervening months, there was a wide range of practice as teachers introduced the elements, increasing their frequency until all three parts of the lesson were taking place each day. Most teachers recognised the importance of preparing children properly for Year 1 by giving them sufficient experience of the full daily mathematics lesson. As in literacy, however, a small minority of teachers, about one in twelve, failed to bring the elements together before the end of the reception year.

36. Teachers with mixed-age reception and Year 1 classes usually taught the full daily mathematics lesson from the beginning of the autumn term. While a few teachers included reception children in these lessons from the start, most made separate arrangements using teaching assistants or nursery nurses. This provision commonly included play activities, the oral/mental starter and the main teaching activity. Reception children often joined the rest of the class for the plenary or, where the subject matter lent itself to suitable adaptation, the oral/mental starter. This practice provided the younger children with good models of how to respond to whole-class teaching.

37. Similar procedures were also common when there was more than one point of entry each year to the reception class. On the whole, these teachers were sensitive to the needs of summer-born children, particularly with regard to the importance of learning through planned play activities and the need for them to catch up with their peers.

Quality of Teaching of the Daily Mathematics Lesson

CONTENTS

38. Evidence from section 10 inspections carried out during the year showed that more good lessons in mathematics were taught in reception (including mixed-age reception/Year 1 classes) than in any other year groups except Year 6. Unlike the teaching of literacy, there was very little difference in the quality of teaching of reception pupils in single-age and mixed-age classes.

39. In the schools in the survey, in the autumn term 2000, half the sessions were good. By the summer term 2001, the teaching had improved to such an extent that nearly four out of five sessions were good and none was unsatisfactory. In four fifths of the sessions, the children's response to the teaching was good. They enjoyed mathematics and most made good progress in their learning.

Oral work and mental calculation

40. The oral/mental starter was a strong part of the mathematics session throughout the year. The teaching was good in three quarters of the sessions, improving further in the summer term, when much of it was very good. The teachers and children enjoyed these sessions. The children gathered together with the teacher to recite number rhymes, sing songs, play a variety of games and take part in activities designed to improve their numeracy skills.

> *Children in a smaller than average urban school were practising `counting on'. The class teacher produced a large puppet, called `Silly Billy', who was learning to count and needed the children's help. The teacher pretended to be Billy, making deliberate mistakes, which the children corrected. This was repeated several times, the teacher asking the class questions such as, `Which number did Billy miss out? What should come between 12 and 14?' This was a lively and purposeful start to the lesson, with very good use of the puppet (who was called `Clever Trevor' when he got things right) which engaged the children's interest and attention. The very good level and quality of questioning made a significant contribution to the children's learning.*

41. In another school, the teacher and a teaching assistant worked extremely well together, teaching number bonds to 10 in three activities at different levels of difficulty.

> *The teaching assistant did much of the demonstration, using cubes and number cards, leaving the teacher free to work closely with the children. She made excellent use of the day's date (8th), to elicit different number facts for the number 8. Children's responses included `7+1', `8+0', `even', `12-5' (the error was used effectively to illustrate how to subtract 5 from 12), `5+3', `bigger than 2', `smaller than 100'. There was further reinforcement of counting to 8 using cubes, and some excellent demonstration, using a pupil volunteer, of why 8 is an even number.*

42. Co-operation between teachers and teaching assistants took a range of different, but often equally good, forms. In schools where reception children were normally in a class with Year 1 pupils, teaching assistants or nursery nurses often worked separately with the reception children. This practice allowed the class teacher to concentrate on the older pupils to the benefit of both year groups.

Main teaching activity

43. By the summer term, all the teaching in the main part of the lesson was at least satisfactory and it was good in a large majority of the sessions. Most teachers devoted up to 20 minutes to direct teaching, which developed the ideas around which the later activities were based.

44. A class of reception children in a London school worked with their teacher, putting numbers in order.

> *The learning intentions for the session were written on the board and read: `Today we are going to learn about numbers that come before, after and between. We are also going to count to 20.' Key vocabulary cards were pinned to the board, `before', `after', and so on. The teacher demonstrated by showing a large cut-out star with a number on it; the children were asked to identify the numbers that came before and after and to hold up that number of fingers. The teacher asked good, open questions such as, `What do we know about the number that comes before?' The teacher then held up two stars and asked, `What number comes between?' The children moved into ability groups. The task was to work in pairs, each pair with three paper plates, one of them with a number on it. The children had to record on the other two plates the numbers that came before and after. Higher-attaining children worked on numbers to 20, those with average attainment to 15. The lower-attaining children went outdoors with the teaching assistant, where they put large cut-out stars in order onto a washing line. Discussion focused on before, between and after. While the class teacher worked with the more advanced group, a parent volunteer helped the children with average attainment.*

45. As in literacy, most teachers kept the number of mathematics activities manageable. In the 20 or 25 minutes given to individual or group activities, teachers usually worked with groups of children. Virtually all the teachers ensured that the children consolidated their learning with follow-up activities. A few teachers had mathematical and literacy activities taking place simultaneously, but most preferred to keep the activities separate so that they could be more easily monitored.

46. Well-planned, independent play activities within the main teaching activity typically included table or floor games, or sand and water play. Activities such as printing were used to reinforce children's ideas about number and pattern, usually supervised closely by an assistant. The *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage* notes that `the idea of "pattern" runs through different aspects of mathematics. Children might notice repeating patterns of colours or shapes . . . or they might help to create a repeating pattern with beads.' reception teachers were skilled at providing practical and enjoyable activities of this type, within the broader structure of the daily mathematics lesson, which reinforced children's mathematical development.

47. In another school, following teaching on handling money, children in a mixed-age reception/Year 1 class worked on a wider range of activities, including playing with construction and other equipment. The teacher, however, made sure that all the children took part in the shopping activity during the session, under her direction.

> *Groups of children in turn helped set up the class cake shop with boxes of biscuits and cakes the class had cooked during the week. The children practised buying items of their choice, giving change and selecting the correct coins. The teacher worked intensively with individuals, helping them to understand how to give change using small amounts to 5p, and stimulating the children to talk about what they were doing and why. Exchange of role from shopper to shopkeeper helped to develop their understanding. `Shopkeepers' were introduced effectively to the use*

of a calculator through the use of the shop till. While this went on, other groups worked in turn with the teaching assistant, talking about the graph they had made of their heights as part of their topic work, and looking at the original data collected. There was good use of ICT to aid this task. Prompted by the assistant, the children considered who was the heaviest, lightest and so on. The children then wrote their own questions to display with the graph.

Plenary sessions

48. The plenary session was a relatively weak part of mathematics sessions. There were fewer good sessions than in either the oral/mental or the main teaching activity and there was more unsatisfactory teaching - one in five sessions in the autumn term, but falling to one in ten in the summer. Nonetheless, the majority of teachers had good understanding of its purposes and used the session effectively to reinforce learning, summarise key ideas, assess children's understanding and give further explanation.

49. The session about using paper plates to develop mathematical vocabulary, included a very good plenary in which key learning objectives and the vocabulary were revised and reinforced. A good balance was maintained between children's own talk and further direct teaching.

All children returned to the carpet when they had tidied their tables. The teacher speeded up the process by playing a counting game: `Give me a number that comes before x and after y', with those children already on the carpet, and this encouraged the rest to hurry up. One of the children from the lower-attaining group explained what they did. The class teacher had collected all the completed plates (numbered and starred) and distributed them in turn to individual children who positioned themselves (and their plate) on to an imaginary number line. The earlier game was revisited, `Give me a number between x and y', `What number comes before x and after y? The session ended with all the children reciting `Five little monkeys', with actions.

50. The plenary was most effective when it followed on immediately from the mathematics work that the children had been doing. A few teachers, however, placed the plenary at the end of the day, sometimes incorporating literacy, but this was less successful. On other occasions, the teachers felt that children were too tired to gain much from a plenary so late in the day and so omitted it.

Planning

CONTENTS

51. Teachers of reception pupils had to make adjustments over the year to the ways in which they planned and taught English and mathematics. Having come to terms successfully with the changes of approach brought about by the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, in addition they needed to take account of the early learning goals and the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage.*

52. The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies' objectives for the reception year are not broken down by terms (unlike the objectives for Years 1 to 6). This is helpful in enabling teachers to select the relevant objectives for reception pupils, depending on their

age, learning needs and stage of entry to school. The early learning goals themselves are in line with the objectives in the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies *Frameworks for teaching*, whilst the `Stepping Stones' in the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage* provide a helpful description of the progression in children's learning towards those goals. As the foundation stage was introduced, reception teachers had to take account not only of the reception year objectives in the two frameworks - in essence, the early learning goals - but also the implications of the `Stepping Stones' for planning, teaching and assessment.

53. Most reception teachers are clear about what they intend the children to learn in literacy and mathematics and, with the introduction of the foundation stage, most teachers started to use the early learning goals, the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage* and the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies Frameworks alongside each other when planning work, both in the medium term and for each week. The best teaching is underpinned by detailed planning and organisation and indicates not only when children will be working individually on an activity but also when there will be small and large group work in which the children are taught skills and concepts directly.

54. During the implementation of the foundation stage, most teachers continued to use the planning forms in the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies Frameworks, or suitable adaptations, making clear the teaching objectives and activities for each element of the literacy hour and mathematics lesson. Following foundation-stage training, teachers also began using the `Stepping Stones' to assess children and support their planning. Few schools had revised their schemes of work, however, to take account of the various sources of guidance that they were now expected to follow.

55. As the year progressed, well-organised LEAs issued helpful guidance on planning, in which the early learning goals were mapped against the detailed NLNS objectives for reception. For example, one for literacy issued by an inner-London LEA also incorporated appropriate references to the National Literacy Strategy publication, *Progression in Phonics* (*PiP*).

56. One LEA published a full-colour booklet entitled *What about reception?* This considered not only how the early learning goals might be used in planning for the NLS in the reception year, but also many other issues such as how to organise the elements of the literacy hour, special educational needs, and boys and literacy.

57. Another LEA produced a useful series of booklets to help teachers plan for mathematics in reception and through Key Stage 1. The first of these, *Foundation Mathematics in the Reception Year*, supported sensibly the good teaching which was already in place. The emphasis throughout was on how to sequence structured play activities effectively, following the oral/mental session, and how to promote good progression in children's learning. Another booklet focused on planning for mixed-age classes, including classes with children from both the foundation stage and the whole of Key Stage 1. At the time of the survey, however, many reception teachers did not have the benefit of such useful guidance.

58. The *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage* describes and supports good teaching in the foundation stage, including the reception year. It provides detailed, useful examples of how both well-planned and spontaneous play underpin children's mathematical and linguistic development. Nevertheless, during the year, teachers were often unsure about the extent to which they had to change what they were already doing. Teachers needed reassurance:

- that the early learning goals and the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies'

objectives were consistent with one another;

- that there was scope for meeting children's different needs through teaching the elements of the literacy hour and the daily mathematics lesson at different points during the day in large and small groups;
- that direct, interactive teaching and well-planned play both had a part to play in helping children to meet the early learning goals and that these approaches were complementary and not contrasting;
- that the curriculum in the foundation stage, including the combining of the separate elements of the literacy hour and the daily mathematics lesson by the end of the summer term, prepared children to make a smooth transition to Year 1.

Assessment and Record-keeping

CONTENTS

59. Most teachers have a good knowledge of the attainment of the children in their classes. Baseline assessment is regarded as an important means of identifying children's knowledge, understanding and skills. The results are used to organise small groups for teaching in literacy and mathematics and to plan suitable activities. In the best practice, baseline assessment is also used to set simple targets for the children's learning, shared with their parents. Some teachers expressed concern that, with the move of baseline assessment to the end of the reception year, there would be no formal system to measure the progress children had made before they entered Year 1.

60. As a basic minimum, nearly all the reception teachers in the sample kept some records of their children's attainments, such as a phonics checklist and a note of high frequency words learned. Otherwise, the teachers used a wide range of assessment procedures, including regular assessment of children's reading and writing skills, accompanied by dated records. Some approaches combined the above assessments with collections of children's work. The best of these were annotated to show the extent to which the NLNS reception objectives were being met. Many teachers used a list of objectives for each child, highlighted with different colours to show how well the child understood each one. This was useful as it helped to identify clearly what the child needed to learn next.

61. During the course of the year, teachers became more familiar with the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage* and began to use the `Stepping Stones' to support assessment or to guide the observation of children's play. The best of the resulting records were updated frequently, often with the help of a teaching assistant, but the teachers were not always sure what use to make of what had been recorded. Teachers found it difficult to put in place assessment procedures that were detailed and yet manageable. One LEA produced a booklet, *Making Mathematics Manageable in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage One*. The main section identified key objectives for assessment and provided a timetable and appropriate, practical assessment games and tasks. In addition, there was a helpful analysis of baseline assessment, comparing the model used by the LEA with the approach promoted by the National Numeracy Strategy for reception.

62. Most of the teachers made good use of their assessments of children's attainment in literacy and mathematics to plan further work. Many relied on oral communication within the teaching teams to gain a picture of children's attainment and to plan further work as a result. Where this discussion was based on clear records as well as anecdotes, activities

were matched more accurately to children's abilities. The best of the planning formats included a section for evaluation, in which the teachers noted what needed to be done next, by which groups of children. Such formats were helpful in providing efficient ways of linking planning and assessment.

Management and Training

CONTENTS

63. The professional isolation of a number of reception teachers emerged strongly from the survey. Many had no other foundation-stage colleagues with whom to discuss their work or from whom to receive informed advice. Some reception teachers were concerned that they would become detached from the main work of the school. Understandably, many identified more with Key Stage 1 than with the foundation stage, particularly where they were also the school's literacy or mathematics co-ordinator or were responsible for Key Stage 1.

64. Teachers expressed mixed opinions about the foundation-stage training provided by their LEAs. The sessions on play were considered useful, but there was disappointment about the limited amount of advice on the teaching of early literacy and mathematics. The training was most successful where National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies consultants worked alongside the LEA foundation-stage team, presenting a well-considered, unified approach. Elsewhere, teachers referred to mixed messages, resulting in confusion and, on some occasions, a loss of confidence. There were other teachers who, even towards the end of the year, had received no training for the foundation stage.

65. Few headteachers had attended foundation-stage training or were otherwise well informed about this stage. Very few claimed to have seen the NLNS guidance for the reception year, even though both sets of guidance were given to all headteachers during the NLS conferences held during the autumn term 2000. There was little direct monitoring of how the foundation-stage curriculum, including the elements of the literacy hour and the mathematics lesson, was being implemented in reception classes. Headteachers were not generally in a good position to advise their reception-class teachers about planning and teaching. There were some notable exceptions, usually where headteachers had good experience of the early years. One such headteacher had identified difficulties in a nursery class following her analysis of the reception baseline assessments and was reviewing teaching and learning. Another exception was a small village school where the headteacher and staff worked closely together to ensure the best practice. In both schools, the headteachers were clear about what needed to be done to make the most of the foundation-stage guidance and National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies practice to suit their particular groups of reception children.

66. Responsibility for the foundation stage was allocated variously to early years, Key Stage 1 or subject co-ordinators. Few of them were well placed to advise the reception teachers. Early years co-ordinators were most likely to have attended foundation-stage training but, where they taught in a nursery class, often lacked experience of the two Strategies. Key Stage 1 co-ordinators had seldom attended foundation-stage training and very few had seen the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies reception guidance. There was little classroom observation by co-ordinators, either to monitor the teaching or to find out more for themselves about the teaching in reception.

67. Just over half the schools had compiled action plans to help them to implement the foundation stage, but only a quarter of the plans that were produced had enough detail to

be useful. They included a small number of schools with attached nursery classes, where there were often, but not always, stronger efforts than elsewhere to establish for young children an educational phase which had a distinct identity.

68. The best of the action plans outlined how the foundation-stage curriculum would be introduced, what changes would be made to planning and teaching in literacy and mathematics, and what training would be required. The weak plans lacked criteria for monitoring and evaluating the successful implementation of the foundation-stage curriculum, including children's attainment. Few schools had considered formally the costs of establishing the foundation stage effectively. Very few of the plans described in detail how communication, language and literacy, and mathematics would be developed through effective and carefully planned play, the place of the literacy hour and the daily mathematics lesson, or how the children would be prepared for Year 1. The plans rarely included curricular targets.

Admission Arrangements

CONTENTS

69. Although the majority of schools have a single point of entry in September, the admission arrangements of a minority create particular problems for the teachers. The children who enter school in January and, in particular, after Easter, have had less time in school than other children. They join their classes at points in the year when the rest of the children have already settled to established routines and ways of working. This is a long-standing situation in these schools, however, and teachers resolve the difficulties as best they can by planning separate activities and teaching groups.

> *In one school, with three points of entry, all elements of the literacy hour and daily mathematics lessons were taught from the beginning of the autumn term. The routines were well established before the second group of children entered in January. After an induction period, the new children were given additional, daily support from a teaching assistant to get them off to a good start and help them catch up. The teacher was acutely aware, however, that few of the summer-born children would be ready for work in Year 1 by the start of the autumn term.*

70. There were other arrangements to help combat the problems caused by different points of entry to school. Among these were stronger links with other pre-school settings, including playgroups, in order to develop a more consistent teaching programme throughout the foundation stage. One school planned to provide joint training. Other settings were developing common assessment and recording procedures. Several reception teachers, not only in those schools with more than one point of entry, offered help to nearby playgroups in planning the foundation-stage curriculum.

Conclusion

CONTENTS

71. This report records much positive achievement, as well as a few areas of continuing concern. Its findings reflect well on the skill and commitment of reception teachers to adapt to the new requirements placed on them by the introduction of the foundation

stage. Any concerns schools may have had about the difficulty of adapting their teaching of literacy and mathematics in the reception year to meet the requirements of the foundation stage have been largely dispelled by those in this sample.

72. Reception teachers have had the benefit of helpful guidance from a range of sources, but they have not always received it when they needed it and, on occasions, they have been given conflicting advice about how to plan for and teach literacy and mathematics in the reception year. There has been a quick and helpful response from a few LEAs. They have provided reception teachers with much-needed practical suggestions for planning and have ensured that teams of advisers with an interest in the reception year have worked together successfully. More LEAs need to follow this example.

73. Now that the foundation-stage curriculum is in place in the reception year, schools need to turn their attention to revising their schemes of work so that teachers have a clear, unambiguous framework within which to plan their work over the course of the year and ensure that children are well prepared for the work they will encounter in Year 1. It is a cause for concern that there are schools where the children have not experienced the full literacy hour or the daily mathematics lesson before leaving the reception year.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

	This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.
X	This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").