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Article

Mastering Number: Building strong foundations in early maths

Why number sense, fluency and flexibility are the building blocks young children need for future success in maths.

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With thousands of primary schools in England now delivering the fully-funded programme, Mastering Number at Reception and KS1, we speak to Sue Evans, NCETM Assistant Director for Primary, to find out more.

What does Mastering Number at Reception and KS1 involve and how does it support teachers?

The programme has been designed to help teachers ensure that ALL children are able to develop a fluency and flexibility with number that we can describe as ‘good number sense’. Having good number sense includes being able to subitise, understand how numbers are composed and can be decomposed, compare quantities and see how numbers are related. Having a deep and secure understanding of number lays the firm foundations that sets children up for success later on. Children who have good number sense will find it easier to become fluent in number facts within 10, and use these to calculate efficiently and accurately across 10.

What kind of professional development do participating teachers receive?

Teachers involved in the programme receive dedicated training across the year. Each term they attend a central training session led by the NCETM, and a local session led by their local Maths Hub. They will also be part of a local Work Group and have the opportunity to collaborate in an online community with teachers in other schools. This supportive approach ensures that teachers have the pedagogical understanding and support networks in place to deliver the programme with confidence to their pupils.

What materials do teachers receive as part of the programme?

Schools involved in the programme will receive sets of teaching materials each half-term. For Reception, these materials should form the basis of the teaching for all the number work, and include

lesson plans for 4 sessions a week, as well as a wealth of ideas for embedding maths in continuous provision and routines.

For Year 1 and Year 2, the materials will provide planning to support the teaching of a short, daily fluency session. Teacher guides and slides are included to help teachers lead an interactive and engaging session.

As well as providing support for the teaching of the session, the teacher guides also offer 'bite-sized chunks' of subject knowledge directly linked to what will be taught in the sessions.

Do participating schools receive rekenreks?

Yes. All schools engaging in the programme will receive a set of rekenreks, which is an integral part of the Key Stage 1 sessions. Rekenreks help children see, feel and manipulate numbers, which all contributes to them developing good number sense!



How does Mastering Number support children from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who are learning English as an additional language?

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds may have had fewer experiences to hear and talk about number in their everyday lives. They may not have played games with dice or number tracks, counted the stairs up to bed every night, sung number songs, or been asked to fetch '3 bowls and 3 spoons' at tea-time. By fully utilising the planning available, Reception teachers can ensure that all children have opportunities to engage in carefully constructed, short lessons, and be immersed in number in the wider environment, to give them the experiences they need. These experiences are good for all children, but especially for

disadvantaged children. Year 1 teachers will be supported to understand the Early Learning Goals, and to support those children who had not achieved these in Reception.

In all the year groups, children are explicitly taught precise, mathematical language; this helps them communicate their thinking and reasoning. Opportunities for mathematical talk are embedded in the sessions, and children are supported to learn through talk. This is beneficial for all children, especially those who are not yet confident talkers, and those learning English as an additional language.

- **READ:** Discover what Ofsted has to say about Mastering Number in our guide on how to put its 2023 maths report into practice

What long-term impact does the programme have on children's mathematical understanding?

Schools that have implemented the programme successfully over a number of years report that their pupils are moving into Key Stage 2 with increased confidence as well as fluency. Securing fluency in addition and subtraction facts, and being able to use these to calculate efficiently with larger numbers, helps children access the Key Stage 2 curriculum much more easily. If you know that $7 + 5 = 12$, then $\frac{7}{10} + \frac{5}{10}$ must be $\frac{12}{10}$! And if you know that double 8 is 16, then you can use that knowledge to find the product of 2 and 8!

- **LISTEN:** Our podcast episode features two teachers who explain how Mastering Number has influenced teaching across their primary school in the North East

What kind of feedback have you had from schools involved in the programme?

There has been so much positive and exciting feedback! So many teachers tell us of how their children's confidence as well as competence has grown. One maths subject leader involved in the programme recently told us about a child who passed her in the corridor and commented, 'I never used to like maths but now I'm loving it!'

Become a Mastering Number school

Applications are now open! Discover for yourself how the Mastering Number Programme at Reception and KS1 develops strong number sense, fluency and confidence in all children.

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