



Nick Gibb MP
Minister of State for School Reform

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Dear Colleague,

I would like to express my sincere thanks for your hard work and dedication at the school you've been based at for the past few weeks. By sharing your maths teaching expertise and deep subject knowledge with the teachers and students, you have played a crucial role in improving the quality of maths education in our schools. I know that they have benefitted enormously from your support as they transform the way maths is taught. I hope that your experience in England is equally valuable and that you are learning as much from us as we are from you.

When our teachers returned from Shanghai last month they were overwhelmingly positive about the teaching they had observed. They saw the greater length of time spent on whole-class interactive teaching, which we know from research is more effective than groups working on different activities. They appreciated the meticulous design of the lessons, carefully crafted to foster deep conceptual and procedural knowledge and how this was tested by precise questioning in class to ensure that no pupil was left behind. This mastery approach helps all children to progress in mathematics and achieve a high standard.

Our teachers have already started to benefit from your expertise and made changes to the way they teach. They have recognised the need to spend longer on topics and go deeper in order to truly master the subject. Through lesson observations, collaborative planning and the advice and support you have provided, improvements have been made in schools across the country and teachers are reporting that even after a relatively short time there is a noticeable difference in the progress their children are making.

High-quality textbooks are central to teaching in Shanghai. Our teachers have taken great interest in the sample materials that you have brought with you and they are now exploring how high-quality textbooks can be used to improve their own teaching.

Our teachers noted that the mastery approach focuses on arithmetic and number, with pupils spending more time on high-quality, productive practice – meaning students end up with deeper, stronger mathematical understanding. This point was illustrated to our teachers by the effective teaching of times tables in Shanghai primary schools to develop fluency and instant recall. This focus supports quick and efficient mental calculation and accurate written calculation leading to true mastery of the mathematics that pupils need for the future. In English schools the weakness in pupils' times table knowledge is being recognised as slowing them down and hindering progress.

Our new primary maths curriculum is designed to improve students' understanding and fluency in maths and early memorisation of times tables is crucial to that aim. We have specified that all pupils should now be fluent with times tables at an earlier age – up to 12 X 12 by the age of 9, rather than up to 10 X 10 by age 11, as was the case previously. I believe very strongly that every primary school pupil should know all their tables by heart, with instant recall by the end of year 4 at the latest; and should start learning their tables no later than year 2. Our teachers have been eager to explore how you achieve the high level of fluency with tables and some schools are already introducing special 'fluency sessions' and times tables tests at the start of each lesson, which is a helpful step forward. Over time we intend to roll out the key elements of the Shanghai approach to maths more widely and truly transform the way maths is taught in this country, to ensure that the aims of the new curriculum are fully met.

I would like to thank you once more for being part of this programme, which I hope will be the first of many, in a long and mutually beneficial partnership between our countries.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

Nick Gibb MP