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Mr J Bateson-Winn
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Bateson-Winn

Ofsted 2011–12 good practice survey: primary mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 8 June 2011 to look at your work in mathematics, with a particular focus on arithmetic. I am especially thankful for the generous time you gave to our discussions.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting as well as wider dissemination of good practice. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

Evidence was gathered through: interviews with staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documents; analysis of pupils' work; observation of two lessons, a working session with a small group of pupils in Years 5 and 6, and a learning walk to all other classrooms.

Features of good practice

- Attainment in mathematics is high and the progress made by pupils in Key Stage 2 is significantly above the national average, and has been in the top 5% of all schools nationally twice in the last three years. Within this, the quality of pupils' understanding of number is particularly impressive. As a consequence, pupils' achievement in mathematics is outstanding.
- Adults' and pupils' attitudes towards mathematics are very positive. Many pupils claim mathematics as their favourite subject and explore new problems and tackle demanding challenges with genuine enthusiasm. They are undeterred by problems they may not have encountered previously and show a willingness to discuss and explain their thinking. Teachers, for their part, work hard to establish a 'readiness for learning' by ensuring that pupils have a confidence in the subject that encourages mathematical exploration and understanding well.

- Pupils use their very strong understanding of place value to solve number problems. In one example, pupils were invited to 'position' increasingly challenging numbers on a blank number line. This generated considerable skills in estimation and visualisation. All have at least one secure and appropriate method of calculation which they can use. The school elects not to teach traditional standard methods in two- or three-digit multiplication and division but pupils' deep awareness of the number system means that they show a very flexible and fluent approach to less formal methods of calculation. Accuracy levels are high. All of this enables pupils to apply their understanding particularly well across a breadth of real-life and problem-solving activities.
- The accurate use of precise mathematical vocabulary by adults and pupils is expected and routine. As a result, pupils explain their thinking with clarity and show an outstanding grasp of key concepts.
- Teachers work in teams of four. This enables shared planning and leads to a coherent and differentiated curriculum which ensures that pupils are always working on tasks that are well matched to their abilities. Considerable thought goes into the grouping of pupils into sets. The sharp focus on weekly pupil-progress discussions informs movement between sets and the prompt provision of good additional support for pupils whose progress slows and challenge for those who are more able.
- Strong subject knowledge in mathematics, particularly by the subject leader, allied to strong questioning skills, leads to high levels of challenge. As the school recognises, not all teachers have equally high levels of subject knowledge, or receive regular opportunities for additional training in mathematics.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing further teachers' confidence and subject expertise in mathematics to match those of the best.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop mathematics at Mead Vale Community Primary School.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Ceri Morgan
Her Majesty's Inspector