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Mr A Ratchford
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Ratchford

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 18 May 2011 to look at your work in mathematics, with a particular focus on arithmetic.

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 collected through: interviews with staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documents; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of two lessons and parts of five lessons.

Features of good practice

- Outstanding leadership and management are characterised by setting challenging targets and monitoring pupils' progress towards them. Any gaps in pupils' calculation skills and understanding are quickly identified and promptly remedied by well-targeted intervention.
- Good provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is reflected in the stimulating learning environment and carefully structured learning through play. Children are well supported by whole-class and small-group practical activities, which promote the strong development of mental strategies and calculation skills.
- Outstanding teaching is evident in the high level of challenge and rapid pace of learning in lessons. The use of interactive whiteboards, computers and practical equipment makes a significant contribution to pupils' understanding of the relationships between numbers, such as place value and partitioning.

- Assessment is used particularly well in lessons to evaluate pupils' understanding. Teachers' astute questioning, prompting pupils to explain their reasoning and checking the answers they have written on mini-whiteboards, enables any misconceptions to be remedied immediately.
- The provision of clear learning objectives and individual targets ensures that pupils know what they are expected to learn. Constructive feedback, self-assessment and analytical marking of pupils' work ensure that they know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.
- Pupils' learning of mathematics is fun and enjoyable in key stages 1 and 2. Pupils play mathematical games, investigate numbers and shape and become fully engaged in quick-fire question and answer sessions with their teachers. As a result, they develop an interest in the subject, behave extremely well in lessons and take great pride in their work.
- The broad and well-structured mathematics curriculum provided enables pupils to build their calculation skills systematically and use and apply them in purposeful and meaningful problem-solving situations.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- making greater use of estimation and approximation to help pupils to judge whether their answers are close to those expected and using their good knowledge of inverse operations, regularly, to check results and eliminate calculation errors.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop mathematics at St Margaret Ward Catholic 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

Colin Smith
Additional Inspector