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Miss J Steele
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Dear Miss Steele

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.

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; and observation of seven lessons.

Features of good practice

- Pupils' achievement in number is outstanding. Pupils are developing a high level of proficiency for their age in the four operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. This is underpinned by a secure understanding of place value and good recall of number facts, such as number bonds to 10 and 20 and multiplication tables. Pupils also gain understanding in the different ways operations can be represented: for instance, they know halving is the same as division by two and grouping into twos.
- Pupils sustain their concentration very well in lessons. These are designed as a sequence of short stages of whole-class teaching or individual/pair work, often with bursts of song, rhyme or chanting as pupils move from one stage to the next. No time is wasted.
- Teachers' use of assessment in lessons is a particular strength. Teachers and teaching assistants are constantly assessing pupils' progress.

Consequently, they are able to pick-up and tackle quickly any misunderstanding or difficulty, occasionally using immediate one-to-one support, so that pupils do not fall behind. Regular mini-plenaries are a common and key feature of the lessons. Moreover, the teachers' informal ongoing assessments feed directly into the next day's lessons.

- Problem-solving is an integral part of all lessons although some pupils experience more of these and challenges, such as 'let's explore' and 'put your thinking cap on!' than others. Sometimes, such activities form part of the 'maths journal' sessions each afternoon.
- The academy has been following the Singapore mathematics curriculum for about six months. Consequently, its impact on achievement has not yet been evaluated, but this is planned later in the term. The academy is well resourced with complete sets of teachers' handbooks, pupils' workbooks, and support and extension materials for the year groups currently in the academy, Nursery to Year 2. However, teachers do not have handbooks for the older primary years. These would aid longer-term planning and help teachers to see how the development of current learning, including its notation and structures, lays the foundations for later.
- The staff have worked closely together in introducing this new mathematics curriculum with the continuing shared aim that all pupils should achieve highly. The subject leader provides an excellent role model of classroom practice. You and she reflect continuously on this new curriculum and its successes, aware of the next steps, to tailor it to the academy's context and ambitions for the pupils. A longer-term strategic view is developing through a range of actions, some already completed, such as mapping content to the National Curriculum, enriching the resources and activities, and provision of professional development for staff. Other planned actions include work scrutiny, a calculation policy, and evaluating the impact of all of this work on pupils' progress over time.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- devising a development plan to underpin the longer-term strategic development of mathematics.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop mathematics at Ark Academy.

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.

Yours sincerely

Jane Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector