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Ms C Garbett
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Garbett

Ofsted good practice survey: study plus in mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 11 June 2007 to look at work in study plus.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: discussions with the coordinator, pupils, observation of a lesson and discussion with the headteacher.

Features of good practice observed

Standards and achievement

- The scheme is having a positive impact upon achievement. Records show that pupils are gaining higher grades in their mathematics modules this year than the corresponding group did last year.
- Pupils are more confident than they had been at the start of the year. They also think that the work covered fits in well with the school's status as a business and enterprise specialist school.
- The scheme helps pupils' personal development, particularly their understanding of real-life scenarios and preparation for their future economic well-being.

Teaching and learning

- The quality of teaching observed was very good; feedback from pupils confirmed that they really enjoy lessons.

- Very good use is made of real-life work which motivates pupils as they feel it is highly relevant. They responded positively, for example, to the stimulus of the numbers of travellers on two steam railways over a five-year period.
- Pupils' clear responses showed they have a good understanding of the mathematical concepts covered and how these are applied in real-life problems.
- The topics covered and the way in which they are taught help pupils make sense of the mathematics. They also think it helps them in other subjects, for example science. One pupil explained how the work they had done recently on cars had been of use when she was discussing selling the family car with her parents.
- Lessons are supported by a very good teaching assistant. Joint planning ensures she has a good overview of the lessons and is able to take a full part, for example asking appropriate questions during whole-class discussions.
- The scheme is well received by pupils who think it helps them prepare for GCSE mathematics by ensuring they have a better understanding of the work as well as increasing their interest and enjoyment.

The curriculum

- The school has adapted materials provided by the Secondary National Strategy, and written its own units, to suit the subject matter usually taught in 'conventional' mathematics lessons.
- Pupils follow the course as part of their wider mathematics entitlement. The school sees it as a way of helping those in danger of not gaining a higher grade in GCSE mathematics to be successful.
- Next year, when the number of sets in this cohort is decreased for Year 11, extra pupils will join the study plus set. Previous experience has shown that pupils quickly adapt to the different emphasis in lessons.

Leadership and management

- The highly effective co-ordinator has worked closely with the local authority and made good use of the mathematics consultant's support.
- The work has influenced the co-ordinator's teaching in other year groups and classes. There are well formed plans to disseminate the work to other members of the department later this term.
- Plans to continue with a similar group in next year's Year 10 have not yet been confirmed.

Inclusion

- The work with this targeted group supports their efforts to gain a grade C or higher in mathematics well.
- A few pupils were initially reluctant to be in the group but subsequently all except one saw it as real opportunity and responded well to the scheme.

Further development

We discussed the following areas for further development of study plus in mathematics:

- confirming arrangements for next year
- building upon the very good practice by disseminating expertise to other groups and teachers.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop study plus in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Michael Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector