

The work of Ofsted: Commons Education Select Committee inquiry September 2015

1. About ACME

- 1.1. The Advisory Committee on Mathematics Education (ACME) is an independent committee that develops advice to influence mathematics education policy. ACME was established in 2002 by the Royal Society and the Joint Mathematical Council of the UK with the explicit backing of all major mathematics organisations in order to provide constructive advice on mathematics education.
- 1.2. ACME would like to draw the Committee's attention to the value of the subject-specific aspects of Ofsted's work and the role of Ofsted in policy.

2. Subject-specific approaches

- 2.1. National subject-specific reports such as *Mathematics: made to measure*¹ provide essential information about mathematics teaching and learning in England which is not readily available from other sources. Such reports provide valuable insights into practice, highlight issues and offer recommendations for how to overcome issues and improve practice in schools. These reports are a source of authoritative comment on teaching practice which can be used to inform training and development in schools.
- 2.2. The subject surveys conducted by Ofsted in schools are also very valuable. Ofsted visits up to 50 schools each year on mathematics subject survey visits and publishes the findings.² These visits provide schools with feedback on their overall effectiveness in mathematics and highlight strengths and areas for attention. The outcomes of these surveys can help schools leaders to recognise good mathematics practice in the classroom and build on areas of best practice. Furthermore, publication of the surveys means the findings can also have influence on practice beyond the school visited. Subject survey visits are also made to schools graded as 'outstanding', which are exempt from routine inspection. Therefore, these visits can be used by Ofsted to identify and communicate examples of good and outstanding subject-specific practice to the wider school community.
- 2.3. ACME is concerned that subject-specific aspect of Ofsted's work has decreased and that no national mathematics-specific report has been published since *Mathematics: made to measure* in 2012. As highlighted above, subject survey visits and reports are unique and valuable sources of information to the education community. **ACME recommends the publication of regular updates to subject-specific reports.** In the short term, **we would advise the publication of a mathematics-specific report**

¹ Ofsted (2012). *Mathematics: made to measure*.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/417446/Mathematics_made_to_measure.pdf.

² <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/mathematics-subject-survey-visits>.

focusing on the implementation of the new curriculum and assessment approaches in schools.

3. The role of Ofsted in policy

- 3.1. ACME welcomes the role of Ofsted in informing policy and evaluating the impact of policy changes. Reports from Ofsted inform priorities for policy by highlighting key issues observed in schools. For example *Mathematics: made to measure* noted the extensive use of early entry to GCSE as an obstacle to greater progress in schools. Ofsted also has a role in evaluating the implementation of policy changes in schools through changes to the inspection framework. This provides key information about how schools are responding to policy and whether the policy is achieving its aims.