



GEORGE TOWN PRIMARY SCHOOL

INSPECTION REPORT

JANUARY 2007

LEAD INSPECTOR: CAROLINE DAWES



Cayman Islands Schools' Inspectorate

Working in partnership for high quality education for all students

Foreword

The aim of the Schools' Inspectorate is to contribute to continuous school improvement in the Cayman Islands, through rigorous external evaluations of schools and by providing high quality policy advice and training.

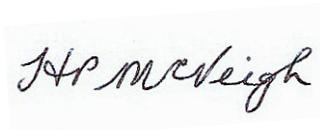
Each school receives an inspection every four to six years. The inspection identifies the school's strengths and the areas that need to be improved. Between inspections, schools are visited regularly by a link inspector to check on the progress that has been made in tackling the priority areas and to support the school in its own self-evaluation.

Inspectors are guided by the criteria in the Cayman Islands Handbook for the Self-Evaluation and Inspection of Schools.

Inspections provide schools, parents and the community, the Education Department and the Ministry of Education, Training, Employment, Youth, Sports and Culture with an external and impartial evaluation of the quality of a school's work and its impact on students' learning and the standards they achieve. Through the publication of inspection reports, inspection contributes to accountability, transparency and openness within the education system.

Self-evaluation by schools is considered to be an important part of the Cayman Islands school evaluation model. Together with inspections, self-evaluation provides a balanced system of internal and external accountability for schools.

The Inspectorate hopes that this inspection will contribute in a positive way to helping George Town Primary become a more effective school.



Helena McVeigh
Chief Inspector of Schools

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL AND THE INSPECTION TEAM

THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Government primary

Age range of students: 4 years 8 months – 11 years

Year groups: Years 1 to 4

Gender of students: Mixed

Number on roll: 197

School address: PO Box 1099, Grand Cayman KY1-1102

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Name of Principal: Marie Martin

THE INSPECTION TEAM

Lead inspector:	Caroline Dawes	Cayman Islands Schools' Inspectorate
Team inspectors:	Mary Bowerman Helena McVeigh Edna Platts Mary Summers	Cayman Islands Schools' Inspectorate Cayman Islands Schools' Inspectorate Local Occasional Inspector Overseas Inspector

INTRODUCTION

Information about the school

George Town Primary is a government school for boys and girls from Year 1 to Year 4. The school, which is located in the middle of George Town, was devastated by Hurricane Ivan in 2004 when many classrooms and offices were destroyed and most of the school's documentation was lost. There is still no office space and many classes are taught in temporary modular classrooms.

There are four classes in Year 1 and three in each of Years 2 to 4. On average, there are 15 students per class.

The school has five teachers who provide various forms of learning support and counselling. There are also visiting teachers for information and communication technology (ICT), physical education (PE) and English as a second language.

Information about the inspection

The inspection took place from 15th January to 19th January 2007 and involved a team of five inspectors, plus two trainee local occasional inspectors. The following aspects of the school's work were looked at:

- Standards achieved by students in language arts and mathematics
- The effectiveness of teaching and how well students learn
- The quality of students' personal development
- The quality of the curriculum and how students are assessed
- How well the school is led and managed
- The quality of the support and guidance offered to students, and the level of care for their welfare
- The effectiveness of links with parents and the community

The team also evaluated how well teachers help students to use their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills across all of their school work.

Inspectors used the following grading scale to describe aspects of the school's work:

Grade	Judgement	Description
1	Excellent/very good	Good in nearly all respects and exemplary in some significant areas
2	Good	Good in most respects. Weaknesses are minor and not in significant areas
3	Satisfactory	Adequate in most areas, no significant weaknesses, but no major strengths
4	Unsatisfactory	Some significant weaknesses (might only be one or two) that have negative impact on learning and standards

The inspection team gathered evidence in the following ways:

- 42 lessons or parts of lessons were observed, mainly language arts and mathematics, but including other subjects taught.
- School documents, including teachers' planning, curriculum statements and guidelines, were looked at.
- Students' work was scrutinised.
- Inspectors spoke with students and took their views from the questionnaires into account.
- Discussions with teachers and other members of staff, including visiting (peripatetic) teachers, took place.
- Comments from parents at the meeting before the inspection and from the questionnaires were taken into account.
- Information obtained through the regular link inspector visits was also considered.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

How effective is the school overall and how much progress has it made since the last inspection?

George Town Primary is a good school. The way the school inspires students' positive attitudes to learning and provides for their personal development is excellent. Parents are very well involved and the school plays an important role in the community it serves.

The school is well led by a principal who is passionate about providing the best possible care and support for students. Her clear vision is well communicated and shared by everyone involved in the life of the school.

The teaching that students receive and the progress that they make are good. Teachers know their students well and usually plan lessons that involve them in a wide range of activities. Some lessons are excellent, particularly when teachers are confident about the subject they are teaching.

The school has made satisfactory progress since its last inspection, despite the devastation by Hurricane Ivan, which destroyed classrooms, offices and most of the documentation. The high calibre of some of the teaching staff, coupled with a determined and committed principal means the school is well placed to improve even further.

What the school does well

- The way the school helps students to develop self-discipline, respect for each other and a love of learning
- The way the principal leads the school so that her values and vision are clearly communicated, understood and shared by all members of the school community
- Students achieve well in reading, writing, speaking and listening
- There is some excellent teaching that engages and enthuses students, enabling them to make good progress
- The dedication of the principal and staff in providing the best possible care and support for every student
- The involvement of parents and the community in the life of the school

What needs to improve

- The way that teachers help students understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve
- The teaching of more able students so that they achieve higher standards, particularly in mathematics
- The involvement of other members of the senior management team in the leadership of the school

The school is expected to modify its existing improvement plan or to prepare a supplementary action plan to address the areas for improvement identified above. The amended plan or supplement should be sent to the Education Department and Schools' Inspectorate within 40 working days of receipt of the final report. The school is required to provide parents with an annual update on the progress that is being made in addressing the areas identified as needing to improve.

How high are standards at the school?

Overall, the standards that students achieve are in line with what is expected for their ages, although they do better in language arts than in mathematics. More details about standards in these subjects can be found later in this report.

Many students are confident, fluent speakers who use a wide vocabulary. They can often recall facts and explain their answers in full sentences.

Less able students frequently make good progress in lessons and achieve standards in line with expectations. Sometimes the standard of the work they produce is above expected levels because of the good support they receive. The standard of the work produced by more able students is only in line with expectations for their age. Many could achieve higher standards, particularly in mathematics.

How effective is the teaching and what impact does it have on students' learning?

Overall, the teaching at George Town Primary is good. Many teachers are enthusiastic, dynamic and relate well to their students in informal and caring, but not over-familiar ways, creating a classroom ethos that enables students to make good progress.

Teachers know their students well and plan lessons that involve high degrees of active learning. In many lessons, students are engaged in a variety of activities that are well-differentiated to match their needs. A range of strategies is used to cater for individual needs. Students are given different tasks according to their ability and the teacher asks targeted questions aimed at individuals. Sometimes students use a particular piece of equipment or different resources, for example a piece of computer software. Teachers ask good questions and students are confident to answer, discuss and pose questions of their own. Students work well independently as well as in pairs and groups.

As a consequence of the positive ethos that teachers create in their classrooms, students are excited about learning and make good progress. For example, in a Year 4 science lesson, students were working in groups on an experiment to demonstrate air pressure. When a piece of card stayed in place on their upturned cups of water the students' faces lit up in amazement and they rushed to record their findings as if they were scientists making a discovery for the very first time.

Despite most of the teaching being good, there is some that is unsatisfactory. This was usually in lessons in which students were not involved in activities. For example, sometimes the teacher talked too much, or question and answer sessions went on too long. In these lessons, students made limited progress. Teachers are sometimes more confident in teaching some subjects than others. Better support and guidance are needed in these cases to help teachers maintain a high quality of teaching in all of their lessons.

Some teachers are making good use of informal ongoing assessment of students' progress to plan the next steps for them. In some classes, teachers take time at the end of each day to review what students have learned. This helps students to reflect on their progress, as well as giving teachers an idea of what has been learnt.

Although students' work is checked regularly, teachers seldom provide written comments to help students understand how to improve. Students are not given enough clear goals related to their work. These would help them take more responsibility for their own learning and channel their positive attitudes into achieving higher standards.

Many students enter Year 1 with social and language skills that are lower than expected for their age. As they move through the school, students make steady progress in most areas and their language skills improve greatly. The school has implemented policies that target below-average students with notable success, and these students make good progress. They are identified early and are withdrawn from classes to receive extra help from special education teachers, especially in literacy.

What is the quality of students' personal development?

Students' personal development is very good.

There is a very caring atmosphere at George Town Primary, which is noticeable both inside and outside the classrooms. The relationship between teachers and students is one of mutual respect, and this provides an excellent basis for the school to develop students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding.

Students are encouraged to develop their understanding of Christian principles by attending church, and through taking an active part in assemblies. Assemblies introduce the 'value of the week'. Teachers reinforce this in lessons and, through the principal's weekly newsletter, parents are encouraged to do the same at home. Students enjoy the worship songs they learn and can even be heard singing as they work in some lessons.

Students understand the difference between right and wrong, and make a determined effort to avoid situations that would cause trouble. Students working in the special needs room are encouraged to 'put negative talk in the trash' by writing out what they have said or intended to say, that is not appropriate, and putting it in the bin. There were further examples in other areas of students reporting incidents to their teacher rather than taking matters into their own hands. The school is very effective in developing students' self-discipline. Teachers give lots of praise and recognition for good behaviour and attitudes, actively developing students' self-esteem and social skills. For example, students are encouraged to talk and socialise during lunch and to work together in pairs or groups, helping and supporting each other. Students are given the opportunity to reflect on how well they are doing in their personal development when they fill in their "Reflecting on Myself" sheets at the beginning, middle and end of term.

Local culture is celebrated well. Students enjoy taking part in Pirates' Week festivities, for example, when parents and members of the community come together to prepare the school's float for the parade. Students have the opportunity of visiting some of the district heritage day events and the school has its own Quadrille dance group, which performs at various local functions. The school has a number of different nationalities amongst the student body. These students are encouraged to share something of their different cultures during the school's annual 'International Night' and during Commonwealth Day celebrations, when parents and students are invited to wear national costumes and bring a sample of their national food. Students are encouraged to share their different languages, by, for example, praying in their home language during assembly. Teachers use these times to teach respect for those who come from

another culture and students are also learning about the customs, costumes, food and language of other countries.

What is the quality of the curriculum and how effective are the arrangements for assessing students?

Students experience a broad curriculum that caters especially well for all aspects of their personal development. High priority is placed on character education and parents are delighted with the way the school helps their children become well-behaved, responsible and caring young people.

Although all subjects are taught, too much time is spent on some, to the detriment of others. Students receive only half an hour of physical education every week, which falls short of Education Department guidelines. They also do not have enough opportunity to develop their creative talents through art and music.

The curriculum is relevant to students' interests and abilities. Grouping students by ability works well, especially for language arts, because lessons are planned at different levels and help the students make good progress. In some instances, even within an ability group, teachers plan different levels of work, meeting the individual needs of students well. The lower ability groups are especially successful, as work is carefully planned to meet their individual needs. In mathematics, however, there is often a lack of challenge for the most able students, even in the higher ability groupings.

Teachers' curriculum planning is effective in ensuring that students build upon their previous learning. Plans show what should be taught in all subjects over the year. Teachers work well in year group teams to refine these further, providing termly, half termly, monthly and sometimes weekly plans. As a result, no matter what class they are in, students in the same year group cover the same work.

Students benefit from a wide range of after-school activities that support their academic, personal, physical and creative development. Teachers give of their time willingly to provide these activities, showing high levels of commitment to the school and students.

About a quarter of students are currently in the wrong year group for their age. Some are repeating a year because they were judged not to be ready for the next class. However, the school's monitoring shows that this practice is ineffective. Even after repeating one or more years, several students in Year 6 last year still remained at levels below those expected for their age. Some other students are placed in classes for younger children because English is their second language. This is a particularly ineffective strategy as these students can make very rapid progress in their learning as their English acquisition improves. Placing students in the inappropriate year group has a long term impact on their schooling as it is very difficult for these students to ever be in a class covering work at the standard expected for their age.

Students' progress is tracked appropriately. Annual TerraNova tests in language arts and mathematics are supplemented by end of unit and termly assessments. Teachers also review students' achievements weekly, often discussing concerns about individuals at year group meetings. The school developed an assessment policy before Hurricane Ivan. However this was lost along with much other documentation and it is yet to be

rewritten. There is some inconsistency of practice amongst staff, especially in the way that students' work is marked.

The school has started to analyse students' achievements but progress on this aspect has been slow. Little has yet been done to analyse test data to determine general or common weaknesses in specific aspects of different subjects, so that the curriculum can be adapted accordingly.

How well is the school led and managed?

The leadership and management of George Town Primary are good.

The principal is passionate about the school and has excellent personal knowledge of individual students. Her commitment to the care and support of every student, in order that they can learn is reflected in all aspects of the school's work. She leads by example in her relationships with children and their parents.

The principal has a clear vision for George Town Primary, based on providing excellent care and support for students so they can achieve their best and develop a love of learning. This vision is shared well through regular meetings and written communications with everyone involved in the school. It is a central part of the strong school culture and is key in creating the positive ethos that enables students to learn.

Many staff at George Town Primary have experienced some professional development, either on-line or overseas. The school also takes every opportunity to participate in on-island training organised by the Education Department, Schools' Inspectorate or University College. However, this training is not always targeted at teachers' individual needs. Staff are motivated to improve their practice and grow as professionals. There is some mentoring within the school, particularly for new teachers. This is positive and is an area that could be extended further.

There are examples of good team work in the school, particularly within year group teams where joint planning is a strong feature. This team work is less evident within the senior management team, which has only recently been established in its current form. There is a lack of clarity of the function and composition of the senior management team, and the roles individuals play in the leadership of the school.

Along with her vice principal, the principal monitors all aspects of the school well and is very aware of its strengths and shortcomings. Some teachers are supported well by the vice principal in developing their practice, particularly in Year 2. This support could be targeted more strategically, and extended to involve other members of the senior management team, to contribute to systematic improvement in identified weaknesses in teaching.

How effective are other aspects of the school's work?

The support and guidance offered to students and level of care for their welfare

The school cares for and supports its students very well, and has very good systems for ensuring their health and safety. Students' attendance and punctuality are good.

The school lost most of its students' records during Hurricane Ivan in September 2004. These comprehensive personal files included test scores, academic reports, records of awards received and health records. The school is in the process of building these up again. All teachers have access to students' reports and test scores from the last two years. They use these well to help allocate students to the correct ability grouping and for decisions about any additional support students may need.

Students' attendance and punctuality are closely monitored. Notes are sent home to parents of students whose attendance and/or punctuality is of concern, and the school then works with the family to remedy the situation. Sometimes home visits are made, and in extreme cases, the Education Department's truancy officer is notified. Certificates for perfect attendance and punctuality are awarded at assemblies on a monthly basis and at the end of each term. These strategies are generally effective in encouraging and motivating students.

Behaviour in and around the school is good. The school has an effective behaviour policy that is used consistently by teachers. They send home daily records of each student's behaviour, which parents are required to sign and return with their child the following morning. They use praise to encourage and motivate. Students enjoy receiving stickers, notes to their parents or 'high fives'. Positive behaviour is also rewarded with certificates that are displayed on bulletin boards.

There is a good programme of counselling. The school counsellor teaches character education lessons to all classes. These are usually connected to the 'value' of the week, such as self-control, which students have been introduced to in assembly. There are also good opportunities for group and individual counselling.

The school provides additional, regularly scheduled, support for students whose first language is not English, and for students who have a hearing impairment. A useful inclusion policy has been produced that has the potential to help teachers integrate these students more effectively into mainstream classes. Extra help is provided in reading, writing and mathematics for students who are underachieving or who have special needs. Some students have individual educational plans. The teachers involved in supporting these students meet weekly to review their progress. The consistent support that these students receive enables them to make good progress. There is not the same level of support and challenge for the most able students.

Students' health, safety and well-being are a priority at the school. There are always teachers on duty during break and lunch times and there is adequate supervision before and after school. A 'Medical Alert Book', kept in the office, helps to make staff aware of students' medical problems. All staff received basic first aid training at the beginning of the school year. A school nurse is available twice a week, and the school also has an arrangement with the Bodden Town dental clinic.

Links with parents and the community

The links that the school has with parents and the community are excellent.

There is very good communication between the school and parents. Parents can easily approach the principal and teachers and they are consulted on major issues concerning the school. There is a comprehensive parent/student handbook and parents are kept well informed of events through weekly newsletters. A curriculum meeting is held at the beginning of the year to give parents an overview of what their children will be learning over the coming months. There is a very active Parent Teacher Association. Well-attended meetings are held regularly and include useful workshops on how parents can help support their child's learning.

Parents are very supportive of the school. At the end of the summer break, many parents and students helped prepare the school by cleaning the grounds, posting signs and preparing booklets. Parents are welcome in the school and attend awards assemblies, sports events, and sometimes have breakfast or lunch with the students.

Students participate in all local competitions and island-wide activities. For example, they enter the mathematics and science exhibitions, inter-school sports competitions, Children's National Festival of the Arts and spelling bees. In addition they take part in activities such as the Jiminy Cricket Disney science project and Commonwealth essay competition, often with great success.

The school has very strong links with the local community. Students have been involved in performances, for example, at the Governor's residence and St. George's Anglican Church. Many people from the community helped in preparing the school's Pirates' Week float. Students are involved in fund-raising for worthy causes such as the Cancer Society and the Humane Society. They visit the elderly at The Pines and organise a collection of canned goods at Christmas.

What is the quality of teaching and learning in language arts, mathematics and ICT across the curriculum?

Language Arts

Students achieve standards in language arts that are in line with what is expected for their age overall. They are below expectation in Year 4, but above in Years 2 and 3. The results for Year 2 students in the 2006 TerraNova standardised tests were amongst the highest in the country. Standards are improving rapidly as a result of good teaching, especially in Years 2 and 3 where a higher than usual number of students exceed expected levels for their age.

Students' speaking and listening skills are good. They develop a wide range of vocabulary, which they use confidently in their spoken and written work. Their phonic knowledge is generally good and enables them to attempt new words with confidence. Students' handwriting is satisfactory and they learn the correct way to form letters, but older students are not yet developing a fluent joined-up writing style.

Students' enthusiasm and confidence contribute significantly to their good achievement in language arts. They enjoy lessons and put a great deal of effort into their work. They

show remarkable levels of concentration for such young students. This is because teachers present lessons in a lively and stimulating way. In a Year 1 lesson for example, students learned the name and the sound of the letter 'p' by listening and imitating the 'popping' of popcorn in the microwave. They were engrossed and listened avidly, making the 'p' sound every time they heard a pop.

Teachers use a wide variety of methods to help students learn new concepts. They illustrate teaching points by using overhead projectors, engage students in lively question and answer sessions and give them opportunities to work together in small groups and pairs to discuss and refine their work. Students therefore have good opportunities to use new vocabulary and to develop their fluency and confidence in spoken English. Teachers are beginning to use computers as teaching aids, engaging students' attention and interest through colourful and interesting presentations. However, students do not have enough opportunities to use computers themselves to write and publish their work.

Most teachers confidently adapt the curriculum documents to meet the needs and interests of the students in their classes, which further increases their engagement and enjoyment. For example, a creative writing session in Year 2 focused on snakes, which provoked great enthusiasm and excitement. The students wrote interesting stories using many of the adjectives that had been suggested and noted earlier in the lesson.

In a very few instances, where teachers were not experienced or confident in teaching language arts, the lessons lacked a clear focus and the teaching methods were not appropriate. In these situations, students made limited progress.

The quality of the support for the weakest students is excellent. These students are very well motivated by the dynamic teaching and make very good progress. The extremely warm and informal ethos in a Year 4 reading support lesson, for example, made students feel at ease immediately. They quickly began to read the text together with the teacher's help, responding enthusiastically to her questions about the vocabulary and the pictures. With her support they were able to understand and appreciate the story about a Japanese boy. The story came alive for students when they were allowed to try on a kimono to see how the boy in the story felt.

Provision of language arts continues to improve throughout the school. Areas for development have been clearly highlighted and progress on some of these has been good, for example the number of opportunities provided for students to develop their speaking skills. The school improvement plan rightly identifies the need to set clear targets for students as well as provide feedback so that they know how to improve, but so far little progress has been made in this.

Literacy across the curriculum

The school has been working hard to increase the opportunities that students have to practise and develop their literacy skills in other subjects. There is often a good focus on vocabulary in science lessons, for example, and teachers provide many opportunities for students to use new words in their spoken and written work. New words are often displayed so that students learn how to spell them correctly. Teachers ask questions that encourage students to speak at length. For example, Year 3 students considered the different occupations of people in Biblical times and were asked to choose which

they would prefer and why. They answered in full sentences, giving clear and well-considered reasons for their answers.

In some lessons, students are encouraged to write their own reports about their science or social studies work, for example, but this is not a common feature throughout the school. In many cases, work is copied from a central source and students have limited opportunities to write freely.

Mathematics

Students at George Town Primary have very good attitudes toward mathematics and are keen to learn. They are confident, participate well in lessons and are very well behaved.

The progress students make is satisfactory overall and is good or very good in a few lessons. When the activities and resources matched the students' abilities, they were able to grasp the concepts. For example, in a Year 1 lesson on 'longer and shorter' students compared several pairs of objects. Once they could compare correctly, the more able students completed a written comparison on their own while the less able students circled longer/shorter objects on a worksheet. In some lessons, work is not differentiated and the more able students have to wait for others to complete tasks before moving on. This limits their progress.

Teaching is satisfactory. Lessons move quickly and students are actively learning the whole time, particularly when teachers provide the logical steps that students must follow to enable them to make progress. A number of teachers develop students' ability to solve problems. For example, in an assignment in Year 2, students were asked to explain in writing how they got their answers and this extended their thinking skills. However, too often the problems chosen are at a low level and do not allow students to apply their skills in different ways. Lessons that are directed to the whole class tend to restrict progress particularly of the more able students.

The standards that students achieve are as expected for their ages. Lower ability students show the most progress in mathematics because of the good support they receive. The standards that the more able students achieve are restricted by the lack of challenge in their tasks. For example, in a higher ability class, a lesson on place value limited the students to numbers up to 50. This expectation was too low as the students could already read and write much bigger numbers.

Many students are not confident in calculating mentally and their basic skills are weak. Lively mental maths drills are given to groups of students after lunch, but during lessons there are missed opportunities to use these mental skills. In a Year 4 class, for example, students were working with the pattern 'add 20'. These students were not expected to calculate mentally, but instead wrote 60 plus 20 vertically to arrive at the answer. Students, even in Year 4, rely too heavily on counting on their fingers or using multiplication charts when carrying out calculations.

The mathematics curriculum is satisfactory although it has an emphasis on number and some classes are yet to study other areas such as measurement, geometry or statistics this academic year. There is a teachers' manual to guide the teaching of mathematics, which is particularly useful for teachers who are not secure in teaching this subject.

The curriculum coordinator's position is 'acting' and he is unsure of his leadership role. His full-time teaching responsibilities do not allow time for him to monitor the curriculum, standards, teaching and learning of the subject as effectively as would be hoped.

Numeracy across the curriculum

Overall, numeracy across the curriculum is under-developed.

There are few planned opportunities for students to reinforce or develop their mathematical skills in other subject areas. However, some teachers take the opportunity to reinforce concepts such as left and right, and counting, within their lessons.

There are many attractive classroom displays and some of these show the use of numeracy in other subjects. In a social studies activity, for example, students had used measurement to place their pictures accurately on the poster board.

ICT across the curriculum

The school is very well resourced with a wireless network and a computer suite as well as computers in each classroom, although it has suffered from a lack of technical support. Other equipment such as compact disc players and overhead projectors are used effectively in some lessons.

ICT is successfully used by students with special educational needs. In particular, students with language and hearing difficulties are confident in using video and sound recording devices to practise their speech and reading, and to assess their own progress. In a mainstream language arts lesson, a student with special needs was working on a computer on the same topic as the rest of the class. The use of technology helped to keep him on task and make progress.

Students have good ICT skills, as demonstrated in a specialist ICT lesson, but classroom teachers do not build on these enough. Teachers use computers and projectors in assembly and in some lessons, but students have little opportunity to use them. Some students use their home computers to search for information on the Internet and to word-process their stories.

Occasionally, the use of ICT hinders students' learning. In a mathematics lesson, a problem on place value from a piece of software designed for individualised learning was projected on the screen. Students had not learned the prerequisite skills and wasted time on a concept they could not grasp. In this instance, the use of this software did not help the students make progress.