

Maths: parents can make a difference

Feb 2013 - The latest Trends in International Maths and Science Study (TIMSS)



shows that parents have more power to shape their children's achievements in maths than they thought.

In the last round of tests, UK youngsters scored well, although their comparative performance has slipped a little since 2007. Ten-year-olds in England ranked ninth in the world out of 50 (seventh out of 36 in 2007). 14-year-olds came tenth out of 42 (seventh out of 45 in 2007).

Little things like saying 'You can do it' help create a culture of aspiration

The report says: 'A composite variable of seven home activities – being read to, going to the library, playing with numbers, painting and drawing, being taught letters, being taught numbers, and songs/poems/rhymes – had greater predictive power for literacy and numeracy achievement than any other variables studied, including socio-economic status, parents' education and household income.'

It continues: 'Fourth grade students had higher mathematics achievement if their parents reported that they often engaged in early numeracy activities with their children, that their children attended pre-school, and that they started school able to do early numeracy tasks.'

In a country like the UK, where the split between children who achieve an acceptable competency in maths (grade C at GCSE) and those who don't is about 50:50, the report observes: 'Fourth grade students whose parents "often" engaged them in early numeracy activities (49 per cent) had higher average achievement than the students whose parents only "sometimes" engaged them (45 per cent).'

‘England is one of the most improved jurisdictions for the younger age group. There are some reasons for encouragement and, dare I say it, even praise for primary school teachers,’ says National Numeracy chief executive, Mike Ellicock.

However, there is no room for complacency. The report also says: ‘The East Asian countries, particularly Chinese Taipei, Singapore and Korea, are pulling away from the rest of the world by a considerable margin.’