

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



08 October 2008

Ms C Boxall
Headteacher
Holbeach Primary School
Doggett Road
London
SE6 4QB

Dear Ms Boxall

Ofsted survey inspection programme – narrowing the gap in literacy and numeracy

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 30 September 2008 to look at work in literacy and numeracy.

As outlined in the initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of literacy and numeracy, my visit had a particular focus on how effectively the school is narrowing the gap for pupils at risk of not reaching the expected level of attainment for their age. The visit also evaluated the level of expertise within the school to support pupils with learning English as an additional language.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of seven parts of lessons.

The overall effectiveness in narrowing the gap for pupils at risk of not reaching the expected level of attainment for their age in literacy and numeracy was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in literacy and numeracy is good. Standards are below average. The achievement of pupils working below the expected level of attainment for their age is good.

- Overall, when pupils join the school their skills and knowledge, particularly in communication, language and linking letters and sounds are very low.

- Standards at the end of Year 2 have improved over the past few years but are below average. Significantly fewer pupils reach the highest levels in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Standards in literacy and numeracy at the end of Year 6 are below average. In 2007 significantly fewer reached the highest levels in mathematics.
- The school's tracking information indicates that challenging targets are generally met or exceeded. Pupils understand that they have targets to help them improve their literacy skills but they are unclear about their numeracy targets.
- All groups of pupils make good progress as they move through the school so the gap between the nationally expected levels of attainment is narrowing. This is because their varied needs are understood and met effectively both in class and through additional support outside the classroom. As one senior leader said, 'We fit the intervention to support the pupils rather than fit the pupils to the interventions.'
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language and pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because their parents and other agencies are involved quickly in working with the school to ensure their needs are met.

Quality of teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy

The quality of teaching and learning for pupils working below the expected level of attainment for their age is good.

- Expectations of all pupils are high and relationships are good so pupils have positive attitudes to school and work productively.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work well together and are deployed carefully. They have good subject knowledge and are well informed about the specific needs of pupils so provide interesting and varied tasks that are at the appropriate level for pupils to achieve well.
- Pupils have good opportunities to work collaboratively in groups. They say this is fun and helps them to feel more confident.
- Effective, open questioning challenges and guides all pupils to apply their knowledge and develop learning strategies so that they can work independently and are not over reliant on the high levels of additional support available.
- Good use is made of a wide range of resources and pupils are actively encouraged to take responsibility for choosing apparatus, for example in mathematics, which they need to help them.
- Pupils who learn a new skill in a group outside the classroom are supported effectively by teaching assistants in lessons to ensure that these skills are being used in the classroom.
- The teaching space used for some group activities, such as to support the teaching of phonics and reading fluency, is not always suitable and distractions make it difficult for some pupils to hear clearly and concentrate well.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum for pupils working below the expected level of attainment for their age is outstanding.

- The practical, relevant curriculum meets the needs of all pupils well because they are involved in its design and review.
- A strong emphasis is placed on speaking and listening activities.
- A wide range of enrichment activities makes a particular contribution to pupils' enjoyment of learning and helps to broaden the experiences and vocabulary of all pupils, including those who are newly arrived in the country.
- Some enrichment activities are targeted at specific groups of pupils, including those who are learning English and those who are working below the expected levels for their age, to develop their involvement with the local community.
- Pupils who are working below the expected levels of attainment for their age say that they are given special lessons in small groups which helps them to 'catch up'.
- The curriculum is modified when necessary to meet the needs of pupils. For example, an extra teacher has been funded to support a nurture group in Years 1 and 2 who are not yet able to access the same curriculum as their peers.
- Literacy and numeracy activities are linked effectively to other subjects to enable pupils to apply their skills.
- Dual language books which reflect the home languages of pupils in the school are provided.

Leadership and management of literacy and numeracy

The leadership and management of provision for pupils working below the expected level of attainment for their age are good.

- Senior leaders have a clear and relentless focus on raising standards. They are excellent role models and lead by example through their teaching of literacy and numeracy groups.
- Regular pupil tracking and systematic monitoring inform pupil progress discussions. As a result, leaders at all levels have a clear and accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in literacy and numeracy and are knowledgeable about the needs of individual pupils who are working below the levels expected for their age.
- Senior leaders ensure that all staff, including teaching assistants, are well-trained and that their training and deployment is carefully matched to the needs of pupils.
- Leaders are effectively held to account for the standards that pupils reach through performance management.
- Middle leaders have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities but how they evaluate their impact on raising standards for all groups of learners is not yet fully developed or linked to insightful analysis of the school's data.

English as an additional language

The level of expertise within the school to support pupils with learning English as an additional language is outstanding.

- Teachers and teaching assistants have undertaken training in how to support pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- Provision for these pupils is led by a member of staff who was a local authority leading teacher of pupils with English as an additional language.
- Staff who speak an additional language, for example teaching assistants who speak French are targeted to support pupils with the same mother tongue. External agencies provide translation services where necessary.

Inclusion

Inclusion of pupils working below the expected levels of attainment for their age is outstanding.

- The needs of all pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are identified very quickly through regular and thorough assessments in literacy and numeracy.
- Pupils are supported effectively in a variety of groupings in class and outside the classroom. These group activities have clear, short term objectives which are reviewed regularly to ensure they make the progress expected.
- Teachers and teaching assistants are well trained to meet the needs of all pupils, including those with specific learning difficulties, speech and language difficulties and those with autistic spectrum disorder.
- The learning mentor supports pupils and parents well, particularly the most vulnerable. As a result they attend regularly and achieve well.
- A strong culture of inclusion pervades the school which is evident in the words of one senior leader who said, 'We don't give up on anyone'.
- Pupils who are learning to speak English particularly value the help they are given. They say, 'We have lots of conversations and play games. The whole class is involved in helping us'.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that pupils are aware of their improvement targets for mathematics as well as literacy
- considering the appropriateness of the working space used for some group activities
- developing the role of middle leaders to analyse data rigorously so that they can evaluate their impact on raising standards.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to narrow the gap for pupils at risk of not reaching the expected level of attainment for their age in literacy and numeracy 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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Jackie Krafft
Her Majesty's Inspector