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Ms V Moore
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Dear Ms Moore

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 08 December 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 six parts of lessons and support activities.

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 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 writing are lower than expected for their age.

- At the end of Year 2 in 2008 more pupils than nationally reached the expected levels in reading and mathematics but fewer in writing.
- At the end of Year 6 in 2008 targets were exceeded. All pupils reached the expected level for their age in mathematics and most in English.
- Standards in writing have improved over the past three years but the school recognises that they need to rise further and has a focus on improving pupils' writing skills, particularly boys.
- Pupils know the levels that they are working on and the targets that they are aiming to achieve in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Boys and girls whose attainment is below the levels expected for their age at the end of Year 2 make good progress as they move through the school to close the gap because their progress is monitored closely and additional support provided.
- Black pupils are provided with positive role models and attain well compared to their peers nationally.
- The school has identified that although White British pupils make good progress they are not attaining as well as their peers nationally.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language, those who join the school at different times and pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because their needs are identified early and good support provided.
- Parents and other agencies are involved quickly in working with the school to ensure that the needs of pupils at risk of not reaching the levels expected for their age 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.
- Classrooms provide an attractive learning environment with displays that guide and support pupils well, particularly in literacy.
- Planning identifies different activities to meet the varied needs of pupils. Many activities are practical and include challenges and games which the pupils particularly enjoy, although they say they would like even more.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge, model strategies well and readily use subject specific vocabulary. However, there are missed opportunities for pupils to explain their own strategies or reasoning, particularly during the parts of a lesson when the whole class is working together, which limits the challenge provided.
- Good use is made of a wide range of resources, including information and communication technology (ICT) in mathematics, which motivates pupils, particularly those who find literacy and numeracy more difficult.
- Teaching assistants are well deployed and effectively support those pupils identified as at risk of not reaching the levels expected for their age so they make good progress in lessons.

- Pupils' work is marked clearly. It explains what level each pupil has attained and why, so pupils know precisely what they need to do to reach the next level.

Quality of the curriculum

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

- The curriculum meets the needs of pupils well, particularly those who speak English as an additional language and those at risk of not reaching the levels expected for their age, because it is practical and relevant.
- A wide range of enrichment activities which broaden pupils' experiences and vocabulary is motivating them to write and helping to raise standards, particularly for boys.
- ICT is used effectively, to engage and challenge pupils as well as contribute to their enjoyment of literacy and numeracy.
- Pupils in Years 5 and 6 receive daily additional ICT support to develop their literacy and numeracy skills.
- Reading and writing clubs run before and after school are helping pupils to 'catch up'.
- Additional support programmes are modified effectively and targeted carefully to meet the specific needs of pupils.
- A teacher with particular expertise in teaching reading provides additional one-to-one support for pupils in Key Stage 1. These pupils are monitored carefully to ensure their progress is maintained.
- The school funds some external specialist support for pupils with particular learning needs such as dyslexia.
- Opportunities for pupils to use their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects are not yet fully developed, particularly in mathematics.

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 explicit focus on raising standards. They are good role models and lead by example through their teaching of literacy and numeracy groups.
- Detailed tracking and robust analysis of performance information by senior leaders quickly identifies pupils' needs and enables targeted support to overcome barriers to learning.
- The impact of additional support is reviewed regularly and staff are held to account for the standards that pupils reach.
- Literacy and numeracy leaders monitor their subjects so they are clear about what is working well and what needs to be improved.
- The inclusion manager shares effectively her skills and expertise with teachers and parents, for example by modelling the teaching of phonics.

English as an additional language

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

- Provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language is given a high priority and co-ordinated by a member of the senior leadership team.
- The headteacher has a post graduate qualification in supporting pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- The needs of pupils at the early stages of English language acquisition are assessed early and targets match their needs well.
- Effective training ensures teachers and assistants understand how to appropriately support pupils in lessons.
- Staff who speak an additional language, for example a teaching assistant who speaks Urdu, are targeted to support pupils with the same mother tongue.
- There is an induction policy for pupils with English as an additional language which is delivered by an identified teaching assistant who has specific responsibility for learners with English as an additional language.

Inclusion

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

- A strong culture of inclusion is evident in the words of one senior leader who said, 'We don't see low attainment when pupils join us as a barrier. We engage pupils and their parents early.'
- 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.
- Parents are provided with excellent guidance and support.
- Pupils identified as not reading at the expected level receive additional support so they can successfully access the 'booster classes' in the following term.
- Funding is used to provide additional specialist support for pupils with particular needs such as dyslexia and speech and language difficulties. As a result these pupils gain confidence and achieve well.
- Learning mentors provide good pastoral support for pupils, their parents and carers, particularly the most vulnerable, to ensure that they are ready for learning.
- Groups of pupils that the school has identified as at risk of not achieving well, such as black boys, are provided with positive role models by support groups and volunteers from the community so make good progress and attain standards that are above their peers nationally.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing the proportion of pupils who reach the expected levels in writing
- raising the levels of attainment of White British pupils
- providing more opportunities for pupils to develop and explain their ideas in lessons, particularly during the whole class activity.

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