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Mrs R Braithwaite  
Headteacher  
Bedford Primary School  
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Dear Mrs Braithwaite

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 25 February 2009 to look at work in literacy and numeracy.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of literacy and numeracy, the 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 considered the level of expertise within the school to support pupils 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 five part-lessons.

The overall effectiveness of provision to narrow the gap in literacy and numeracy was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' achievement in literacy and numeracy is outstanding. Standards are broadly average.

- The standards that pupils reach, by the end of Key Stage 2, represent outstanding achievement, given their low starting point on entry to

Reception and the higher than average proportion who join the school partway through their primary education.

- By the time they leave the school, the vast majority of pupils reach the level expected for their age in English and mathematics. The proportion attaining a higher than average level varies, being highest in reading but low in writing.
- Pupils gain much ground during the Reception year but, by the end of the year, their early reading and writing skills are considerably weaker than other areas of their learning. That said, children's ability to link sounds with letters has improved since systematic phonics teaching was introduced.
- In 2008, the Year 2 pupils did better in reading and writing than mathematics but, from their starting points, they made at least good progress in all these areas of learning.
- The few pupils for whom English is an additional language make very good progress in learning the language. Some of these pupils go on to attain good standards, notably in mathematics.
- Pupils make excellent progress in their personal development and their positive attitudes to learning support their progress.

### Quality of teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy

The quality of teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy is outstanding.

- All the teaching observed was at least good and some was of an outstanding quality.
- Staff have very positive relationships with pupils and lessons are lively, often imaginative and fun.
- Information and communication technology is used skilfully as a teaching aid and to enliven lessons.
- In the most effective lessons, staff moved learning on in carefully graded steps, so pupils gained confidence, but also at a brisk pace.
- The good teaching of small groups by support staff makes a strong contribution to the school's success in narrowing the attainment gap.
- Day to day assessment, in lessons and through marking, is very good and staff adjust their planning to take account of how quickly pupils are learning.
- Where the observed teaching fell short of being outstanding, it was because of one or more of the following factors: staff missed opportunities for pupils to learn through contributing to discussion; parts of the lesson did not keep all pupils fully involved; or whole class sessions tended to be taught to the middle, rather than taking full account of the range of ability.

### Quality of the curriculum

The quality of provision for literacy and numeracy is outstanding. Provision to narrow the attainment gap is outstanding.

- There is a very good range of well-thought out interventions, to support pupils who might otherwise struggle to keep up or not do as

well as they could. These interventions and the grouping of pupils for them are closely tailored to meet the changing and particular needs of individuals and small groups.

- Many excellent opportunities to develop pupils' speaking and listening skills are built into the curriculum, for instance the use of talk pods.
- Much work on key skills, particularly writing, is rooted in first hand experiences that give learning appeal, relevance and a context for the pupils. Exercise books show that pupils undertake a wide range of writing.
- Daily sessions of phonics have had a positive impact in the Reception class and this approach to developing skills for reading and writing has now been extended through Key Stage 1 and lower Key Stage 2.
- The effectiveness of the curriculum is supported by good resources for learning, including computer software.
- Extra-curricular activities include a Reading club for families in Reception.
- The ethos of the school and the wide range of activities on offer to pupils and their families develop pupils' confidence in themselves as learners.

### Leadership and management of literacy and numeracy

The leadership and management of provision to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are outstanding.

- Provision for literacy and numeracy is given high priority by the senior team, which includes the subject leaders for English and mathematics.
- Assessment of pupils' standards and their rate of progress is used very well to inform planning for future developments and for additional training for staff, and to guide decisions about where additional support and interventions are needed. However, senior staff are aware that teachers' assessments are not entirely consistent throughout the school and therefore the data generated, though useful, is not as robust as it might be.
- The subject leaders have a detailed knowledge of achievement and standards throughout the school and, as a result of regular monitoring, they know exactly which aspects of work are relative strengths and weaknesses in each key stage.
- Staff at this innovative school are continually looking to improve the provision in literacy and numeracy and to raise pupils' achievement. They are forward looking and enthused by new developments such as becoming a Creative Partnerships Change School and involvement in the Effective Early Learning Project.

### English as an additional language

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

- English is an additional language for very few pupils at Bedford and the majority of these pupils are beyond the early stages of learning English.
- The school relies appropriately on the local authority (LA) for specialist teaching support and guidance for staff to support these pupils. The effectiveness of this provision is evident in the pupils' rapid acquisition of English.

## Inclusion

Inclusion in literacy and numeracy is outstanding.

- Staff are whole-heartedly committed to equipping all pupils with key skills of literacy and numeracy and the school has allocated considerable resources to the drive to overcome barriers to learning, through the provision in school and through outreach.
- The school is determined to help vulnerable pupils to benefit from all that is on offer. Two examples serve to illustrate this determination. Firstly, some places on the popular family literacy and numeracy courses and extra-curricular activities are kept for the families of target pupils. Secondly, the cost of the breakfast club and before school care has been kept at affordably low level.
- The learning mentor and the co-ordinator for family learning make a very strong contribution to the school's outreach work which raises families' capacity to support their children's learning and has a proven impact on the pupils' achievement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards of writing especially for the more able pupils
- ensuring that teachers' assessment of pupils' attainment, against the levels of the National Curriculum, is consistent throughout the school.

We noted that plans are in place to tackle these areas.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop 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

Pat Kime  
Her Majesty's Inspector