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Dear Miss Ford

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 11 June 2008 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 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 part-lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement in literacy and numeracy is good. Standards are usually securely above average.

- Pupils make very good progress in acquiring literacy and numeracy skills. Their progress is most rapid in Key Stage 2 and, by the end of

this key stage, nearly all pupils reach at least the standard expected for their age. Nonetheless, pupils do better at reading than writing.

- Pupils have very positive attitudes in most literacy and numeracy lessons. They enjoy learning and show a good level of commitment to achievement.
- In the present Year 6, the school's assessments indicate that standards are well above average in English and mathematics. This strongly suggests that the school's recent focus on English has borne fruit.

Quality of teaching and learning of aspect

The quality of teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy is good.

- Lessons have clear success criteria that are matched to pupils' different learning needs and shared with pupils. In the most effective lessons, these success criteria are used throughout as a reference point for pupils to see the purpose of the learning and judge their own progress.
- Teaching assistants are well-qualified and they are deployed very effectively to support the achievement of individuals and groups.
- There are some examples of very good marking which is informative and helpful for pupils, indicating clearly how they might improve.
- The precision of teachers' assessments varies and some are optimistic. This slightly inhibits the effectiveness of an otherwise very good system for tracking pupils' rates of progress and setting targets for them. The process of assessment and target setting is less well-developed in reading than in writing.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum for literacy and numeracy is good. Provision to narrow the attainment gap is particularly good.

- The school provides a good range of well-planned bespoke packages of support to help pupils who slip behind and those who are underachieving. Its records show that most of this provision results in a step up in progress. However, such improvements are not consistent across programmes or between year groups.
- There is a strong and successful focus on providing support for pupils' personal, social and emotional development as an aid to overcoming barriers to learning. In some cases this support has had a very marked positive effect on the pupils' academic achievement.
- The emphasis on developing pupils' speaking and listening skills as a foundation for writing has proved successful and is enjoyed by pupils.
- Pupils undertake literacy and numeracy activities in a variety of subjects. Whole-school planning however, does not build in planned progressive opportunities to develop and use these key skills across the curriculum.

Leadership and management

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

- The senior team is relentless in its efforts to identify pupils who are underachieving or are at risk of doing so. It is creative and forward looking in its approach to meeting their needs.
- Senior staff evaluate rigorously the effectiveness of provision in literacy and numeracy and have begun to analyse the reasons for differences in the effectiveness of various aspects of provision.
- Monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning and of pupils' progress in literacy and numeracy is rigorous. Targets are set regularly for all pupils' achievement and very good support, including coaching, is given to staff to help their pupils to realise them.

English as an additional language

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

- Some staff have benefited from attending courses about providing for pupils learning English as an additional language but there is not a deep knowledge of the subject within the school.
- Staff have forged links with schools where there is greater expertise.
- The few pupils who are learning English as an additional language are, for the most part, making at least good progress in literacy and numeracy.

Inclusion

Inclusion in literacy and numeracy is good.

- The school is successful in ensuring that a high proportion of pupils reach at least the standard expected for their age.
- Staff take considerable trouble to adapt packages of support to match individual pupils' needs. The school's records show that, for many pupils, the support leads to an accelerated rate of learning.
- Additional help with schoolwork is backed up by very good support for personal and social development.
- In class lessons teachers generally use differentiated success criteria effectively so, whilst there is challenge, all pupils are able to taste success.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards in writing further
- promoting greater continuity of pupils' progress by further developing teachers' skills for precise assessment of pupils' achievement against National Curriculum levels
- developing the cycle of assessment and target setting for reading

- developing the curriculum to provide more extensive, planned opportunities for pupils to use and develop literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum.

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