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Ms B Smith  
Headteacher  
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Dear Ms Smith

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 12 and 13 June 2008 to look at work in literacy and numeracy.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at the key areas of literacy and numeracy, the visit had a particular focus on how the school is closing the gap for learners 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 students 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 schools but individual schools 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 members of the senior management team, the heads of English and mathematics, the English as an additional language coordinator, students from Years 7 and 10, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of six part-lessons.

The overall effectiveness of provision for literacy and numeracy was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Standards in English and mathematics are well above average. Achievement is good.

- The attainment of students when they join the school in Year 7 is above average in English and mathematics.
- Students make good progress overall but the rate of progress at Key Stage 3 in English and mathematics is outstanding.
- Overall progress is better in mathematics than in English.
- Most groups of learners make significant progress in Key Stage 3. Students entitled to free school meals and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do very well.
- Fewer students than nationally go on to reach the highest possible levels in English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 3.
- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 in GCSE is very high. The percentage of students who achieve five or more good passes at GCSE including English and mathematics is well above the national average.
- Relationships between students are very good and they thrive on opportunities to take responsibilities.
- A small group of lower attaining students in English have not reached the expected level of attainment for their age by the end of Year 9.

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

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

- Literacy and numeracy are promoted well in lessons other than English and mathematics through the use of key words or number-based activities using statistics.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good: positive feedback to students and humour are used well in lessons.
- Marking is inconsistent. Whilst pupils usually know what level they are working at, teachers' comments do not always inform students of what they need to do next to improve. Positive feedback to students is more consistent.
- At its best assessment is used well by teachers to encourage students to assess their own work against National Curriculum levels.
- Lesson planning does not always take account of the starting points of lower attaining students.
- Students say they respond well to lessons that they say are fun, practical and contain opportunities for group work. They are less responsive to working in silence on their own and copying from given texts.

### Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in literacy and numeracy is good.

- Booster sessions in Year 7 in literacy and numeracy give students the opportunity to catch up: they are not withdrawn from foundation subjects.
- There is a strong commitment to languages – all students study two languages in Year 7 and all students participate in lessons. There is a high take up of languages in Key Stage 4.

- A wide range of extra curricular activities support students' development in literacy before, during and after school.
- Both arrangements of setting in mathematics and mixed ability teaching in English work well for lower attaining students. Small groups in mathematics give students additional support whilst mixed ability teaching gives students access to role models.
- Students miss out on some Personal and Social Health Education (PSHE) lessons in order to attend the booster sessions.

### Leadership and management of literacy and numeracy

Leadership and management of literacy and numeracy are good.

- Senior leaders and managers are strongly committed to raising standards for all groups of students.
- Transition from the primary phase is given a high priority and there are well-established links with local primary schools.
- The placement of the inclusion coordinator in both English and mathematics departments and the deployment of experienced well-qualified teachers to lower sets and intervention groups ensures that lower attaining students do as well as they can.
- Detailed monitoring and tracking ensures letters are sent home to parents at an early stage if anyone is not reaching their expected target.

### English as an additional language

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

- None of the staff has specific qualification for English as an additional language. Whilst the inclusion coordinator ensures that teachers are well informed of individual students' needs a whole-school awareness of English as an additional language is under developed.
- The coordinator keeps up to date with guidance and support from the local authority.

### Inclusion

Inclusion in literacy and numeracy is good.

- Students in vulnerable groups do particularly well in Key Stage 3. The progress of students eligible for free school meals and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above the national average for these groups.
- All students are taught in mainstream classes and those taken for additional booster sessions do not miss out on any of their core and foundation subjects.
- Students miss out on some PSHE lessons to attend booster sessions.
- All students are included well in lessons through questioning and effective reward systems.

- Support from older students in the sixth form is highly appreciated by younger students.
- Strong transition links with the primary schools ensure staff know the students' individual needs when they join in Year 7.
- All students and especially younger ones enjoy coming to a school where they value the relationships with each other and with teachers. Attendance levels are very high.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that students know consistently how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work
- enabling students to have more regular opportunities to engage in practical group activities by sharing the best practice in the school more widely.

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

Mark Sims  
Her Majesty's Inspector