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Dear Mr Burt

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 18 November 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 group 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 broadly average. The achievement of pupils working below the expected level of attainment for their age is good.

- Pupils make good progress from their low starting points and most reach the expected levels in literacy and numeracy by the time they leave the school.
- Overall, when pupils join the school their skills and knowledge, particularly in communication, are lower than expected for their age.
- The gap in attainment is closing by the end of Year 2, particularly in reading and mathematics. Standards improved in 2008 and are broadly average. More pupils than nationally reached the expected levels for their age in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Standards in literacy and numeracy at the end of Year 6 vary from year to year and are broadly average.
- Specific targets which identify what pupils need to do to attain the next levels in literacy and numeracy are shared with pupils and parents.
- Detailed tracking and analysis of pupils' progress shows that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language, make consistently good progress.
- Pupils who are at risk of not reaching the expected levels for their age in literacy and numeracy are identified quickly and provided with additional support by well qualified staff.

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.

- Teachers make very effective use of assessment information and their good subject knowledge to provide a range of different tasks that are well matched to pupils' varied needs. As a result, pupils work hard and make good progress.
- Adults are deployed effectively in lessons to support different groups of pupils. Teaching assistants understand the focus of the lesson and the needs of those pupils they are supporting. This is having a significant impact on helping most to reach the levels expected for their age in literacy and numeracy.
- Consistent features of good lessons include ensuring pupils understand what they will be learning; progressing at a brisk pace; providing useful and detailed checklists of success; and planning good opportunities for pupils to discuss their ideas in groups or with a partner.
- Books are generally well presented and marked regularly, although not all errors are corrected and some work is incomplete.

Quality of the curriculum

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

- There is a clear focus on developing early reading skills through a structured phonics programme.

- Curriculum plans ensure that pupils develop their literacy and numeracy skills well by building carefully on what they already know and can do.
- A wide range of materials, including the phonics programme, is modified effectively to meet the different needs of pupils.
- Breakfast booster classes are provided for all pupils in Year 6 three times a week from January every year. Those teachers with particular expertise in literacy and numeracy are deployed specifically to support those groups identified as at risk of not reaching the levels expected for their age.
- Good use is made of the local environment, including The Globe Theatre and London Eye, to enrich the curriculum and develop pupils' vocabulary, particularly those who speak English as an additional language.

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 outstanding.

- Knowledgeable leaders firmly root decision making in a clear and detailed understanding of pupil and staff performance.
- There is a strong culture of openness to change and leaders demonstrate confidence in tailoring provision to meet the varied needs of pupils.
- Systematic monitoring is unwaveringly focused on raising standards and closing the attainment gap for those at risk of not reaching the levels expected for their age in English and mathematics.
- Rigorous, honest self-evaluation helps to identify very specific priorities in the school improvement plan to reduce the proportion of pupils below the expected levels for their age.
- Expectations are high and quantifiable measures of success against which staff will be held to account for pupils' attainment are specific, recorded clearly and discussed regularly in one to one meetings with the headteacher.
- A high priority is given to staff's continuous professional development. Very effective use is made of those adults with particular literacy and numeracy expertise, including advanced skills teachers and leading teachers to support pupils at risk of underachieving.

English as an additional language

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

- Although about half of the pupils in the school speak English as an additional language, few are at the early stages of language acquisition.
- All staff have been trained in understanding the different stages of English language fluency and senior leaders have worked with an external consultant on how to assess the needs of these pupils.

- Language-rich provision in the Early Year Foundation Stage ensures that pupils who enter the school with little English develop their language skills quickly and attain well.
- Many of the staff are bilingual and effectively support those parents who speak English as an additional language when necessary, including helping them to access free English lessons locally.

Inclusion

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

- All pupils achieve well, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most pupils attain the levels expected for their age by the time they leave the school.
- A detailed understanding of individual pupil needs is used to tailor classroom activities and target additional support. The impact of additional support is evaluated in regular meetings with senior leaders to ensure it is making a difference.
- Support and guidance from external specialists, such as educational psychologists, are accessed effectively so that pupils with specific needs, including emotional and behavioural difficulties, achieve well.
- Mentors from local business act as reading partners for Year 2 pupils and are used particularly to provide additional help for those pupils who are not read with regularly at home.
- Good guidance and support is provided for parents from the time they join the school.
- A speech and language therapist is employed for one day a week to provide support for individual pupils and to provide training, support and materials for staff.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensure marking is accurate and that comments identify what pupils need to do to improve linked to their literacy and numeracy targets
- providing those pupils at risk of not reaching the levels expected for their age with opportunities to complete unfinished work.

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