

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr K Doogan
Headteacher
Christ The King Catholic Primary School
Allport Road
Bromborough
Wirral
Merseyside
CH62 6AE

Dear Mr Doogan

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 01 October 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 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 good.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' achievement in literacy and numeracy is good. Standards are well above national averages.

- Standards in English and mathematics are above average by the end of Key Stage 1. By the end of Key Stage 2 standards are well above

average and, in 2008, the vast majority of pupils met or exceeded the standard expected for their age. These standards represent at least good progress, in both key stages, from pupils' starting points.

- During Key Stage 2, last year's leavers made good progress in English and outstanding progress in mathematics. Most pupils who were a little behind the expected standard at age 7 caught up by age 11 and only a few pupils made less than expected progress.
- There are some variations in achievement between groups of pupils and between reading and writing. For example, throughout the school pupils do less well at writing than reading and, in Key Stage 1, the standard of boys' reading and writing lags behind that of girls. The headteacher and the subject leaders for English and mathematics have analysed pupils' standards, identified the variations in achievement, and begun to take steps to tackle them such as purchasing books with boys' interests in mind.
- Pupils' progress is aided by their very good behaviour and their strong commitment to achievement.

Quality of teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy

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

- The quality of lessons observed varied from satisfactory to outstanding. Pupils' good progress shows that teaching successfully promotes good learning.
- The success of the more effective lessons was due to excellent relationships; very good match of work to pupils' varied learning needs; clear explanations; and methodical teaching of demanding new work.
- The less effective lessons were generally slower paced and, as a result, a number of pupils were inattentive and did not progress as rapidly as they could.
- In some classes, the worksheets used for pupils to practice basic skills, and spelling exercises, are not closely matched to pupils' varied abilities.
- Support staff boost pupils' confidence greatly in small group sessions.
- Some marking is good but in a few books the targets set for pupils are not specific enough to help them know how to improve or to see their own progress.
- Teachers regularly check pupils' progress. The school recently introduced clearer systems for keeping track of progress during the year but these are not yet fully embedded.
- Pupils' positive attitudes to school, their good behaviour and their hard work contribute to their good learning.

Quality of the curriculum

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

- The school provides a wide range of intervention programmes to support pupils who need extra help. These programmes are generally effective in improving pupils' confidence and raising their achievement.
- Children in Reception benefit from systematic teaching of phonics. The staff have seen a significant improvement in pupils' reading and spelling skills on entry to Year 1, as a result.
- Pupils have some opportunities to use and develop literacy and numeracy skills across subjects but such provision is not systematically planned and progressive throughout the school.
- There are examples of visits in the local area being used well to provide a context for pupils' writing.

Leadership and management of literacy and numeracy

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

- Senior staff and subject leaders show a strong commitment to raising achievement in literacy and numeracy and some steps have been taken to tackle identified areas for improvement. Others are on-stream for implementation soon.
- At present, the subject leader role is not well-developed and, while action planning at subject level identifies appropriate priorities, it is not clear what will be done to achieve them or how success is to be judged.
- Analysis of information regarding the rate of progress made by pupils following various intervention programmes is not always used as a basis for decisions about provision.

English as an additional language

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

- Advice and support from specialists in the local authority enables the school to provide satisfactory support for the small number of pupils at early stages of learning English.
- The extent of in-house expertise and qualifications in teaching English as an additional language is limited.

Inclusion

Inclusion in literacy and numeracy is good.

- Staff are committed to meeting all the pupils' needs.
- Underachievement is picked up and action taken to support the pupils and help them catch up.
- The school enables the vast majority of its pupils to reach the standard expected for their age.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving standards in writing across the school
- improving the use of assessment to keep track of pupils' progress through each school year and each key stage
- checking the effectiveness of intervention strategies to narrow the gap more effectively to inform decisions about future provision.

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