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Mrs N Checkley
Acting Headteacher
Whitehouse Common Primary School
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Dear Mrs Checkley

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 13 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 learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of six part-lessons all of which included intervention groups.

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

- Pupils enter into the nursery with skills which are above those typical for children of a similar age. At the end of Key Stage 1 standards are above average and are exceptionally high in writing and mathematics.

At the end of Key Stage 2, standards are above average and are higher in mathematics and reading than in writing.

- Pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, those from minority ethnic groups and pupils whose first language is not English, attain higher than similar pupils nationally. Most make good progress and some make outstanding progress, especially in mathematics.
- Personal development of vulnerable pupils is excellent. They are confident, have high self-esteem and show very positive attitudes to their learning.

Quality of teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy

The quality of teaching and learning for pupils working below the expected levels for their age in literacy and numeracy is good.

- Staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and achievement.
- Regular assessments and a high adult to pupil ratio enable learning to be focused closely on the needs of those pupils not reaching the expected levels for their age.
- Teaching assistants are highly skilled and make a valuable contribution to the achievement of all pupils, especially those who are most vulnerable.
- Teaching is consistently good throughout the school.
- Relationships between adults and pupils are excellent.
- Targets for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are closely monitored and support amended if necessary.
- In some lessons pupils are not challenged well enough because the small steps for effective learning are not clearly planned.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum for children working below the levels expected for their age in literacy and numeracy is good.

- There is a wide range of learning programmes which are used effectively to support those pupils who are not reaching the levels expected for pupils of their age.
- Information and communication technology stimulates and motivates pupils.
- High priority is given to pupils' social and emotional development. This helps pupils develop high esteem and contributes to positive attitudes to learning.
- Opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum are not planned carefully enough.

Leadership and management of literacy and numeracy

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

- You and other leaders have successfully created a common vision based upon making sure all pupils feel valued, have high self-esteem and achieve well.
- Regular assessments enable leaders, teachers and support staff to have a thorough knowledge of individual pupils and to target support for those most vulnerable.
- Very detailed tracking of progress made by all groups of pupils and excellent analysis of the data are used well by senior leaders to hold teachers to account for the progress made by the pupils.
- The special needs coordinator has successfully helped the support staff become highly skilled and very effective in raising achievement in literacy and numeracy, especially of the most vulnerable pupils.

English as an additional language

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

- There is no specialist teacher or teaching assistant in the school.
- Although some staff have received training, there is not a deep knowledge of this aspect within the school.
- The supportive ethos of the school helps pupils who are learning English as an additional language settle in quickly and well.

Inclusion

Inclusion in literacy and numeracy is good.

- All groups of pupils achieve well in literacy and numeracy.
- The personal and social development of vulnerable pupils is excellent and provides a firm foundation for learning.
- Regular and detailed assessments in literacy and numeracy help leaders and teachers provide focused support for vulnerable pupils and monitor closely their progress.
- Highly skilled teaching assistants make a positive contribution to the achievement of the most vulnerable pupils.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that teachers successfully challenge all pupils by planning clearly the small steps for effective learning
- ensuring that opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects are planned more carefully.

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

Roy Bowers
Her Majesty's Inspector