

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



01 December 2008

Mr S O'Donnell
Headteacher
Archbishop Ilsley Catholic School
Victoria Road
Acocks Green
Birmingham
West Midlands
B27 7XY

Dear Mr O'Donnell

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 4 - 5 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 students 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 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 senior managers, students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of seven lessons as well as visits to other support arrangements and activities.

The overall effectiveness in narrowing the gap for students 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 good. The achievement of students working below the expected level of attainment for their age is good.

- Students arrive at the school with levels of attainment that are slightly above average though there is a wide spread of attainment in each year.
- The school has a comprehensive programme of assessing students' attainment on entry. The analysis of students' needs is careful and precise.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are well above average. In 2008 the proportions of students achieving Levels 5 and 6 in English were well above the national average and in mathematics they were above average. The trend is an improving one overall.
- In the 2008 GCSE examinations, the proportion of students achieving five or A*- C grades was above the previous year's national average.
- The proportion of students achieving five or more passes at A*-G is significantly above the national average in 2007 and indicates the school's success in continuing to engage the vast majority of its students in learning.
- The students' personal development is outstanding. Behaviour is excellent and students show very good attitudes to learning in lessons.

Quality of teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy

The quality of teaching and learning for students working below the expected level of attainment for their age is good.

- The best teaching was characterised by good planning which engaged students' interests and led to a range of stimulating activities and effective deployment of teaching assistants.
- There was good support for literacy development, particularly in the lesson introductions and reviews.
- Modern computer technology was present in all the classrooms visited and teachers were skilful in its use. Its presence was enabling better support for literacy and numeracy through the activities used.
- Teachers' assessments accurately tracked students' progress and informed planning. Interventions are planned carefully and flexibly to meet the needs of individuals and groups.

Quality of the curriculum

The special education needs (SEN) department is particularly strong at providing good transition arrangements in liaison with the primary school SEN coordinators and parents.

- The average size of teaching groups in English and mathematics is relatively small and this enables greater attention to be paid to the literacy and numeracy needs of lower attaining students.
- Teaching assistants support lower attaining students in lessons.
- Departments have developed a very good range of support material, some of which have a particular focus on literacy and numeracy.
- Some students with particular reading needs have special provision made in the form of reading recovery programmes.
- Strategies such as entering students earlier than normal for examinations creates extra time to focus on other aspects of learning which they might need. For example, early entry in English Literature GCSE in Year 10 enables the English department to focus on language in Year 11.

Leadership and management of literacy and numeracy

The leadership and management of provision for students working below the expected level of attainment for their age are good.

- Students who arrive at the school working below the expected level of attainment benefit enormously from the very positive and inclusive school ethos.
- Developing a close relationship with parents has been a key strategy for the school as a whole: communication with parents is excellent. Additional local authority funding has been targeted on increased staffing levels in English and mathematics.
- There is good leadership and management of the English and mathematics departments. There is insufficient monitoring and evaluation of the literacy and numeracy provision in departments.

English as an additional language

The level of expertise within the school to support students with learning English as an additional language (EAL) is satisfactory.

- Provision for students with English as an additional language is satisfactory. There is a full-time EAL coordinator and one part time teaching assistant to support the significant number of Polish students who have arrived at the school within the last three years.
- The current level of training, expertise and experience for teachers and assistants involved directly in meeting the needs of these students is not sufficient.

Inclusion

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

- Archbishop Ilsey is a highly inclusive school. Students receive excellent care, guidance and support. Attendance is very good. There are high

levels of participation in the various kinds of enrichment and extra curricular opportunities that the school provides.

- Assessment and monitoring arrangements are thorough and inclusive, enabling the welfare and progress of all students, particularly the vulnerable to be very well met.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- review the school policies for literacy and numeracy with a view to clarifying expectations for departments and teachers across the school and enhancing the promotion and monitoring function of the coordinators
- develop the expertise of teachers and staff involved in provision for students with English as an additional language.

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

Bob Roberts
Additional Inspector