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Ms P Roberts
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Dear Ms Roberts

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 12-13 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 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 types of provision 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 average. The achievement of students working below the expected level of attainment for their age is good.

- A significant proportion of students enter the school with poor skills in literacy and numeracy.
- The school's assessment of students on entry is careful and precise.
- A well-established and thorough programme of support is provided for students in Years 7 to 10. As a consequence, the school is successful in reducing the proportion of students who have a reading age below nine as they progress through Years 7 to 9.
- Nevertheless, standards by the end of Key Stage 3 remain well below the national average.
- In the 2008, the proportion of students achieving five or more passes at grades A* - C including English and mathematics in GCSE examinations, well below the national average for 2007.
- The proportion of students achieving five or more passes at grades A* to G was above the national average and is an important indicator of the good progress made by students overall.
- The personal development of students is good.

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.

- Teacher support in literacy and numeracy is good. Teachers work well with students, encouraging and supporting them.
- Teaching of literacy and numeracy skills across subjects is inconsistent and activities do not sufficiently challenge or engage all the students.
- Most teachers confidently use information and communication technology (ICT). When students use ICT themselves their literacy skills are developed effectively.
- Marking does not consistently support literacy and numeracy by showing students how to improve.
- Students value the support they get in lessons.

Quality of the curriculum

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

- A significant number of students receive extra tuition in literacy and numeracy in Year 7. Some continue to receive extra support in Years 8 to 10.
- The school provides an extensive programme of support as students approach tests and exams, from Years 9 to 11. There is a well established calendar of after school study sessions which include intensive evening and weekend residential opportunities.
- New courses which support literacy and numeracy include a national ICT course. Adult literacy and numeracy qualifications are available for lower attaining students.
- The ICT resources are a major element in supporting literacy and numeracy. The computer to pupil ratio is very good. Over 100

students in Key Stage 4 have been given a laptop with internet access to use at home.

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.

- The school's senior leadership team is the driving force behind the achievement of lower attaining students.
- Senior leaders are responsible for the rigorous assessment and monitoring arrangements. They are closely involved with the intensive support provision that many students receive.
- The roles of the literacy and numeracy coordinators lack clarity. Their guidance and advice is satisfactory but there is insufficient monitoring or sharing of best teaching in the school.

English as an additional language

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

- The English as an additional language coordinator has considerable experience and expertise.
- Mainstream teachers have not received any training for English as an additional language, although guidance for teachers in planning to meet the needs of these learners is in place.
- The current level of training, expertise and experience for teachers involved in English as an additional language is not sufficient.

Inclusion

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

- Ridgeway High is a very inclusive school. Students receive very good care, guidance and support.
- Attendance is good and there are high levels of participation in the various support lessons and extra-curricular opportunities.
- Assessment and monitoring arrangements are thorough and inclusive, enabling the welfare and progress of all students, particularly those who are vulnerable, to be very well met.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- review and clarify the roles of the literacy and numeracy coordinators to ensure they are more involved in monitoring how well literacy and numeracy are taught across subjects
- share more widely the best examples of teaching literacy and numeracy across the curriculum
- develop the expertise of teachers and staff in meeting the needs of students learning 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