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16 December 2008

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Dear Mrs Johnson

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 8-9 December 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 and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of seven lessons.

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 outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in literacy and numeracy is outstanding. Standards are above average. The achievement of students working below the expected level of attainment for their age is outstanding.

- Students join the school working at levels that are below the national average in English and mathematics but achieve above average levels of attainment by the time they leave at the end of Year 11.
- The progress of all groups of students at both Key Stages 3 and 4 is exceptional including those at risk of not achieving the expected level.
- By the end of Key Stage 4, the proportion of students who achieved five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics in the most recent examinations, is above average. The overall average has risen significantly over the last three years.
- The school is on track to achieve similarly high results in English and mathematics next year.

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 outstanding.

- Relationships between teachers and students are very strong. For students this is the most important feature of why they enjoy their learning. They know their teachers like them and want them to do well.
- Lessons are characterised by opportunities for active learning with an emphasis on enjoyment. Teachers achieve their aim of making learning "safe, fun and accessible."
- Students are regularly encouraged to evaluate their own work as well as that of others and provide positive as well as critical feedback.
- Through the development of critical thinking skills students are challenged to explain, justify and give reasons for their answers.
- Key words are regularly referred to in lessons with recap exercises and games to ensure they have been learnt. All teachers regard themselves as language teachers.
- Lessons are well planned to suit learners' needs. Lesson activities are for a real purpose and related to everyday life. Lessons draw on students' own personal experiences and build on what they already know.
- Students know how well they are doing and how to reach the next level but at times there is too much emphasis on praise and not enough on next steps for improvement in written feedback.

Quality of the curriculum

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

- Lower attaining students in Year 7 spend most of their time with one teacher until they have reached the expected level for their age in English and mathematics. Students still benefit from the full range of curriculum subjects including specialist subject teachers and do not miss out on any subjects.
- The curriculum is tailored to suit students' individual needs and interests.
- Curriculum displays around the school reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of the staff and students. The achievements of British born

role models from different ethnic backgrounds are celebrated and help to raise students' personal aspirations.

- Literacy and numeracy skills are practiced regularly during registration times.
- Library staff are enthusiastic champions of reading, ensuring there are suitable stimulating books to inspire lower attaining students to read.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) has a limited impact on students' development of literacy and numeracy skills.

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 outstanding.

- Under your inspirational leadership and high profile presence around the school students are highly motivated to do as well as they can. They can see how much you and your staff not only care for their welfare but are prepared to challenge them to achieve as high as they can. Loxford is a happy school but there are also very high expectations of behaviour, appearance and standards.
- Your distributed leadership style ensures that leaders at all levels are closely monitoring how well students are doing and subject leaders are accountable for the performance of all groups of learners in their departments.
- The staff profiles on display around the school show visibly the wide cultural and linguistic diversity in the school which is a resource highly valued by the school.
- Transition arrangements from primary to secondary school are very well managed. Highly trained and experienced staff are deployed to teach lower attaining students.
- Class sizes for lower attaining students are kept small to ensure they have additional support to catch up.

English as an additional language

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

- The coordinator for English as an additional language is highly qualified, experienced and knowledgeable.
- The school has a very good knowledge of the backgrounds and individual needs of students learning English as an additional language.
- Support is tailored to individual needs.
- Well qualified staff are engaged in the training and induction of newly qualified staff.
- Assessment of National Curriculum English is not used sufficiently to track what learners of English as an additional language have achieved.

Inclusion

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

- Loxford is a highly inclusive school where all groups of learners, including lower attaining students, make significant progress during their time in school and do well in their examinations in English and mathematics.
- The school is largely free of any oppressive behaviour. Students from different backgrounds get on very well together.
- The school staff at all levels reflect the cultural diversity of the students and the local community.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that students at an early stage of learning English as an additional language are tracked using the assessment of National Curriculum English
- sharing the best examples of marking more widely through the school so that students consistently receive high quality written feedback.

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

Mark Sims
Her Majesty's Inspector