

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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Mrs Jones
Headteacher
Brandwood Primary School
Brandwood Road
Bolton
Lancashire
BL3 4BG

Dear Mrs Jones

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 28 January 2009 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, observation of four part-lessons and brief visits to two further lessons.

The overall effectiveness of provision to narrow the gap in literacy and numeracy was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' achievement in literacy and numeracy is outstanding. Standards are above average.

- Pupils make outstanding progress in English and mathematics. The school serves a disadvantaged community where a significant number of families face social disadvantage the turnover of pupils is high and

significant numbers join the school late, often with limited English. For most pupils, their starting point is well below average and many speak very little, if any, English. An above average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties. Yet, despite these challenges, standards are above average by Year 6.

- Almost all pupils make the progress expected, moving up two levels of the National Curriculum during Key Stage 2 and many do better than this.
- In 2008, over 80% of the Year 6 pupils reached the level expected for their age and a good proportion exceeded this standard. In English nearly half the pupils reached an advanced standard for their age. The work in pupils' books shows similar standards in the current Year 6.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2008 were not far short of the national average in reading and writing. This represents outstanding achievement. In mathematics these pupils had made good progress but standards were below average.
- At Key Stage 2 there are more high attaining pupils in writing than reading.
- In mathematics pupils have the knowledge and skills to do calculations accurately but are less skilled at using this knowledge to solve problems and undertake mathematical investigations. This is one reason why fewer pupils reach an advanced standard in mathematics than in English
- There are no significant differences in the progress of different groups of pupils. That said, the school has recognised that White British pupils, particularly the boys, do not reach such high standards as the majority. Pupils who arrive with no English are among those who reach the highest standards by Year 6.

Quality of teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy

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

- Teaching is generally good. Some is highly effective and a small proportion is satisfactory. Expectations of what the pupils can achieve are generally very high.
- The most successful lessons push on at a brisk pace. In these lessons teachers show great skill in matching work to pupils' different needs and providing a good variety of well-judged interesting activities. As a result they keep all pupils thinking and learning throughout.
- Where teaching is satisfactory its effectiveness is reduced because too much time is spent consolidating previous learning compared with pushing pupils on. Also a slower pace means that, at times, not all pupils are fully involved in learning.
- There is a generous number of support staff, including many who are bi-lingual. They are deployed wisely and they make a strong contribution to pupils' learning, particularly for those who are new to English or who have learning difficulties.
- The very good arrangements for setting targets that show pupils what they need to do to improve are applied consistently across the school. Teachers keep a very close watch on pupils' day by day progress and

the marking policy is applied consistently so pupils know how they are doing and see that their achievements are recognised.

Quality of the curriculum

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

- The curriculum for English and mathematics covers all that is required and is adapted appropriately to meet particular pupils' needs, such as those who are at an early stage of learning English.
- A good range of intervention programmes are used to help pupils who have fallen behind or who need a bit of extra help to keep up. Staff have devised many of these or adapted commercial materials to meet pupils' needs. They are constantly tweaking the provision as pupils' needs change.
- When pupils are taken out of class for extra help and support, staff plan carefully to ensure that they do not miss out on class work.
- Throughout the school there is a good emphasis on providing opportunities for pupils to develop speaking and listening skills in many subjects.
- The school's well-established, rigorous approach to developing pupil's confidence and ability to write is applied consistently. The effectiveness of this is seen in the high standards of writing.
- A tried and tested programme for teaching phonics systematically has been used for a year and is beginning to pay dividends. Such changes in the curriculum are planned carefully and staff are trained up to implement them effectively.
- In response to a recognised weaker aspect of mathematics, teachers have this year begun to provide more opportunities for pupils to tackle mathematical problems, for instance with the 'problem of the day'.

Leadership and management of literacy and numeracy

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

- Despite the school's evident success, key staff are constantly looking at how it might improve.
- The senior team keeps a relentless focus on ensuring that all pupils acquire basic skills and that the school does all it can to remove barriers to learning. They are determined that every pupil will achieve and are closely involved in monitoring progress, planning interventions and determining priorities for further development, especially in English. These are key factors in the school's success in narrowing the gap in attainment.
- Subject leaders are knowledgeable and they keep a close eye on the quality of teaching, lesson planning and pupils' progress in basic skills throughout the school. They make very good use of data to identify pupils for intervention programmes and to decide priorities for

improvement. They provide useful feedback and good support for their colleagues, including additional training.

- The action plans for literacy and numeracy are well-focused and interwoven with the whole-school plan for improvement.
- From their close monitoring, senior staff are acutely aware of the strengths and weaknesses in each teacher's work. They give well-founded, detailed advice to teachers and challenge them but also facilitate teamwork and the sharing of good practice among the staff.

English as an additional language

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

- The teacher who leads on provision for pupils with English as an additional language is knowledgeable and well-informed about this aspect and provides advice to staff.
- There is a good number of bi-lingual support staff, many of whom are well-qualified. They work intensively on English with small groups of pupils and support those with English as an additional language in class lessons.
- For the most part, class teachers are trained specifically to teach pupils with English as an additional language.
- There are good arrangements for support staff to keep teachers up to date on these pupils' progress.

Inclusion

Inclusion in literacy and numeracy is outstanding.

- The school goes the extra mile to overcome the barriers to learning faced by some pupils and provides a strong network of support for vulnerable pupils and their families, especially through the learning mentor and the lead behaviour professional.
- There are compelling examples of this work raising pupil's confidence and self-esteem, improving attendance rates, and helping vulnerable parents to support their children.
- Provision for pupils with behavioural difficulties and those at risk of disaffection is extensive and effective, with close links between the lead behaviour professional, key workers and class teachers.
- The school provides very good support for pupils to learn English and to settle into school life and make friends when they start.
- There are good links with the local provider of initial provision for the pupils, such as asylum seekers and refugees.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that all teaching is consistently at least good
- embedding improved provision for problem solving and investigative work in mathematics

- further raising the attainment of White British pupils, particularly the boys.

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