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Mr R Small
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Dear Mr Small

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 27 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, and observation of six part-lessons and brief visits to several others.

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

Achievement and standards

Pupils' achievement in literacy and numeracy is good. Standards are broadly average.

- The vast majority of pupils reach the standard expected for their age by the end of Key Stage 2. For most pupils these standards represent at least good progress.

- The proportion of pupils reaching the expected level is a little higher in mathematics than in English. Additionally, in English only around a fifth of pupils reach an above average standard in writing compared with twice this many in reading and in mathematics.
- In Key Stage 1 standards have risen over the last four years. In 2008, there was a particularly marked improvement and standards in Year 2 were in line with the national average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The school's records show that, in most cases, for pupils who receive additional support through intervention programmes the rate of progress accelerates.
- There are some stubborn variations in achievement between different groups of pupils. In general, pupils who start school with little spoken English make more rapid progress than the White British pupils, some of whom face considerable barriers to learning.

Quality of teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy

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

- The teaching successfully promotes good learning. This is evident from the progress that pupils make. There is some very good teaching but also some that is no better than satisfactory.
- The success of the most effective lessons was rooted in: appealing activities that motivated pupils; high expectations; good use of teaching assistants to support the less able and those who need to build up their confidence; very good promotion of speaking and listening skills and learning through discussion; and careful match of work to pupils' different learning needs.
- Where the lessons were less effective, it was down to one or more of the following factors: insufficient tailoring of work for pupils of different abilities; planned activities that were not suitable to promote the learning objectives; teachers not using questioning effectively to push pupils' understanding on; and, in mathematics, not recognising and clarifying pupils' misconceptions promptly enough.
- Marking is usually good and it helps pupils to know what they have achieved and how to improve their work. Teachers set targets for pupils in English and mathematics and keep good track of their progress towards them.
- Teaching assistants, many of whom are bi-lingual, provide good support for pupils who are at the early stages of learning English and for those who have not grasped earlier work, such as how to use sounds to decipher words they cannot read on sight.
- Pupils are well-behaved and the vast majority are keen to do well. They are enthusiastic about having targets and staff's recognition of their day by day achievements. Their good attitudes contribute positively to the orderly, purposeful atmosphere in lessons.

Quality of the curriculum

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

- The school uses a wide range of intervention programmes with a good degree of success. Most are in literacy. These programmes help pupils who need to catch up and support those with learning difficulties. They also boost pupils' confidence as learners. Pupils' attainment is assessed before and after each period of intervention so staff are aware of what works best and adjust support programmes accordingly.
- Two particularly successful interventions were observed. Firstly, the nurture group for pupils in Reception and Key Stage 1; this early intervention concentrates on pupils' personal development. Staff can point to several examples of pupils who have sustained good progress in class after a stint working in this supportive group. Secondly, in Nursery, staff familiarise children who have very little English with books and stories in advance of their use in class. This enables the children to understand what is going on and to participate in lessons.
- The curriculum for literacy has been subject to recent developments in the teaching of phonics and writing and in the planning a creative curriculum which makes links between subjects and is well-matched to pupils' interests. This creative curriculum is providing a rich range of activities which offer meaningful contexts for pupils' writing.
- Pupils have many opportunities to write across a range of subjects but plans to develop their writing skills through other subjects are less advanced.
- The more systematic teaching of phonics in Reception and Key Stage 1 has led to higher standards and pupils' confidence in themselves as readers and writers has increased. Critically, this phonics teaching has been extended into Key Stage 2 to make good gaps in some pupils' phonic skills.

Leadership and management of literacy and numeracy

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

- There is a strong drive for high expectations and achievement from the senior team and subject leaders.
- Subject leaders for English and mathematics have a good overview of standards of literacy and numeracy and the provision to promote them, in particular the effectiveness of various intervention programmes. They provide in-house training for staff, for instance in assessing pupils' writing and developing pupils' vocabulary.
- Plans for improvement address appropriate issues arising from analysis of data.

English as an additional language

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

- The school values pupils' language skills in their home languages. There are staff fluent in eight of the languages spoken by pupils. A growing number of pupils speak Polish as their home language and their teachers have learned some basic spoken Polish in order to support these pupils.
- Teaching assistants are bi-lingual. They are deployed to all classes, though concentrated in the early years and Key Stage 1. They are well-trained, and have good skills to support these pupils to become fluent in English.
- In Nursery and Reception staff read stories to children who have little English in their home language before they hear them in class. This successfully familiarising them with the stories so they can join in the full class session with greater understanding.
- The school's capacity to support English as an additional language learners is heavily dependent on the expertise of the lead teacher and the teaching assistants. Class teachers have not received specific training to support these pupils, though many have considerable experience of working with them.

Inclusion

Inclusion in literacy and numeracy is good.

- Staff are committed to meeting all the pupils' needs and there is a good range of support programmes, both for academic work and personal development to enable this aim to be met.
- Pupils' progress is tracked effectively so underachievement is spotted and appropriate action taken.
- The school enables the vast majority of its pupils to reach the standard expected for their age.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards of writing in Key Stage 2, particularly for the more able pupils
- ensuring that, in all lessons, teachers' expectations are high and the work set is sufficiently closely matched to the range of pupils' attainment in order that all make good progress
- building on the recent changes to the curriculum to ensure that pupils have opportunities to develop their writing in a range of subjects.

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