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Mr G Watts
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Dear Mr Watts

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 24 February 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 five part-lessons.

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 at least the standard expected for their age. This represents good achievement from a below average starting point.
- Standards in English are not as high as in mathematics but, despite a slip in the test results in 2008, the underlying trend in English over recent years is one of improvement.
- Most pupils make good, though not even, progress in English and mathematics. However, last year, only around a fifth of the leavers reached an above average standard for their age.
- In English the standards reached by boys are notably lower than those achieved by the girls and very few boys among last year's leavers reached a high standard for their age.
- Pupils are generally more successful at reading than writing.
- More systematic teaching of phonics in Reception has led to a marked improvement in standards of early reading by pupils start in Year 1.
- The small numbers of pupils with English as an additional language generally at least good progress.

Quality of teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy

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

- The teaching observed during this visit was good, including additional teaching for pupils with English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties.
- Relationships are positive and in the best lessons there was an excellent rapport between teacher and pupils which underpinned pupils' desire to achieve. When teaching is at its best pupils have great fun learning.
- When teaching was less effective, the work could have been harder for some pupils or teachers could have done more to pre-empt pupils' misunderstandings.
- Marking of pupils' work is helpful and encouraging but senior staff are aware that teachers' assessments of the level of pupils' written work are not consistent across the school. This inconsistency inhibits the effectiveness of otherwise good systems to keep track of pupils' progress.

Quality of the curriculum

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

- The curriculum serves the vast majority of pupils well.
- Recent innovations, such as a more structured way of teaching writing, have had some success. However, systematic phonic sessions are not fully embedded in Key Stage 1.
- The reading programme in Key Stage 1 and lower Key Stage 2 is carefully planned but, once pupils have mastered the basics, there is little systematic oversight of their reading to ensure they develop more advanced skills.

- There is a good range of interventions to help pupils at risk of underachieving or who need a bit of extra help to keep up and teaching assistants are trained to provide.
- The school has plans to develop a curriculum in which literacy and numeracy are integrated into cross-curricular thematic studies. This has the potential to increase the opportunities for pupils to use and develop these key skills in other subjects.

Leadership and management

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

- The subject leaders for English and mathematics, though new to these roles, are members of the senior leadership team. They have a strong commitment to developing their subjects, good plans for how they will do so, and the expertise to fulfil them.
- The effectiveness of various interventions is monitored well so staff know how well pupils are doing and which programmes are best suited to different pupils.

English as an additional language

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

- At present, only a handful of pupils are learning English as an additional language. Class teachers are acquiring basic vocabulary in Polish and one teacher has been trained in teaching English as an additional language.
- The school relies on the local authority (LA) for specialist teaching support and guidance. Class teachers support the pupils as they follow programmes of work provided by the LA specialists. This is entirely appropriate in the context.

Inclusion

Inclusion in literacy and numeracy is good.

- Most pupils make at least good progress and the school succeeds in enabling most pupils to reach the standards expected for their age.
- Pupils' achievement is supported well by the staff's commitment to their success and the good range of effective intervention programmes.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards in English, particularly for boys and in writing by:
 - ensuring that phonics skills are taught systematically throughout Key Stage 1

- promoting and developing pupils' independent reading in Key Stage 2
- providing planned opportunities for pupils to develop and use their writing skills across the curriculum
- improving the use of assessment to support greater continuity in pupils' progress through the school, in particular ensuring consistency in teachers' assessments of pupils' written work.

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