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Mr C Pearson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Pearson

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 26 February 2009 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 pupils 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 pupils 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 staff, pupils and external support, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of eight parts of lessons and group activities.

The overall effectiveness in narrowing the gap for pupils 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 pupils working below the expected level of attainment for their age is outstanding.

- When pupils join the school their skills and knowledge, particularly in communication, language and literacy, are lower than expected for their age.
- Pupils' needs are diagnosed early, for example through speech and language assessments, so that support can be given quickly. As a consequence, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language make excellent progress. Partnerships with parents are strong and support is personalised for their specific needs.
- The school places a strong emphasis on supporting pupils' personal, social and emotional development from the time they enter the school so that they are ready to learn and behave well.
- At the end of Year 2 all pupils have reached the expected levels in mathematics for the last two years. In 2008 more pupils than nationally reached the expected levels in reading and writing.
- Pupils at risk of not reaching the levels expected for their age by the end of Year 6 make excellent progress to close the attainment gap. In 2008 almost all reached the levels expected for their age in mathematics and slightly fewer in English.
- The school has identified that English is not as strong as mathematics throughout the school and has had a focus on improving reading and writing.
- The school's analysis of its tracking information shows that the pupils who receive high levels of support are making more rapid progress than other pupils in the school to close the attainment gap with their peers.
- Pupils understand that they have targets for improvement which are displayed in books and classrooms. Older pupils say this helps them know what their next steps are.

Quality of teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy

The quality of teaching and learning for pupils working below the expected level of attainment for their age is outstanding.

- Consistently good teaching in lessons and small groups is sharply focused on pupils' learning as well as meeting their pastoral needs. This is because assessment information is used intelligently to plan varied activities which interest and motivate them.
- Pupils enjoy lessons and say that teachers 'make learning fun by using games'.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work well together and plan effectively to ensure vulnerable pupils are very well supported. Pupils value this saying, 'they explain things in small steps'.
- Pupils trust and respect the adults in school, as a result they are keen to respond and have positive attitudes.
- Expectations are explicit so pupils understand what they will be learning and are actively involved in evaluating their own understanding.

- Pupils value the excellent guidance they are given about strategies they can use to help them learn effectively, particularly in mathematics.
- Good visual reinforcement and the use of songs, actions and puppets support pupils who speak English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities very well.

Quality of the curriculum

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

- A high priority is given to the personal development and well-being of pupils so that they are ready to learn. For example, the first two weeks in September are devoted to activities such as team building and developing thinking skills.
- Opportunities for pupils to use their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects are carefully planned to make learning more interesting and relevant.
- Daily guided reading activities take place in every class.
- Themed weeks and visitors, including poets and authors, motivate pupils and promote reading and writing.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is increasingly used to encourage reluctant writers and voice activated literacy programmes help to develop reading and spelling skills.
- Interactive, practical tasks are set for homework to engage parents in supporting their child's learning.
- Additional provision to help those pupils who need to 'catch up' is effective because it is tailored carefully to their specific needs and delivered by well trained staff.

Leadership and management of literacy and numeracy

The leadership and management of provision for pupils working below the expected level of attainment for their age are outstanding.

- A caring, community ethos where diversity is celebrated and every pupil feels valued underpins a drive to overcome barriers and raise standards.
- High expectations and a 'can do' philosophy encourages staff to try new approaches and also builds pupils' self esteem.
- The headteacher has a detailed knowledge of individual pupils and has effectively balanced a whole school approach to learning with tailored provision to meet pupils varied needs.
- Leaders at all levels are clear about their roles and responsibilities. They are fully involved in monitoring and evaluating the impact of initiatives on the attainment of the most vulnerable learners.
- Additional support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is meticulously planned and monitored to ensure it is adding value.

- The staff team is reflective, open to new ideas and held to account well because improving the outcomes for pupils is understood to be everyone's responsibilities.
- Leaders act as excellent role models for staff and provide good quality training and support to improve provision, including using external experts and specialists.

English as an additional language

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

- Provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language is co-ordinated by a senior leader.
- The school works closely with the local authority Ethnic Minority Achievement Service who provide specific support for pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- All teachers have received training on how to support pupils who are at the early stages of English language acquisition and two have attended additional training on supporting these learners who are in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.
- Teaching assistants have received training on supporting the needs of pupils who speak English as an additional language.

Inclusion

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

- The school advocates for the most vulnerable pupils, including those excluded from other schools, through effective links with a wide range of other agencies.
- The needs of all pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are identified very quickly through regular and thorough assessments.
- Teaching assistants have received training on using Makaton signing in mathematics to help pupils overcome language barriers to their understanding of mathematics.
- Pupils are supported effectively in a variety of small groups in class and outside the classroom.
- Inclusion mentors provide one-to-one and group support to enable pupils with emotional needs to access the curriculum effectively.
- The school is very aware of the strong link between emotional well-being and learning so the school counsellor works with vulnerable pupils on a regular basis.
- Visiting specialists are valued and provided with good resources and appropriate working space to support pupils who need their help.
- New arrivals and their families are integrated into the school effectively, for example with support from the local authority specialist teachers and teaching assistants.

- A homework club is offered in school for pupils who find it difficult to complete their work at home.
- Volunteer readers from the community support pupils in Year 5 to develop their comprehension skills.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing the proportion of pupils who reach the expected levels in English to close the gap with mathematics
- considering opportunities to develop more expertise within the school in supporting pupils who speak English as an additional language.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to narrow the gap for pupils at risk of not reaching the expected level of attainment for their age in 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

Jackie Krafft
Her Majesty's Inspector