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Mr D Judson
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Dear Mr Judson

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 25-26 March 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 senior managers and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of six lessons and visits to other settings.

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 exceptionally high. The achievement of pupils working below the expected level of attainment for their age is **outstanding**.

- The attainment of pupils when they join the school in Year 7 is broadly average in English and mathematics.
- Pupils make **outstanding** progress.
- The proportions who achieved good pass grades in English and mathematics in 2008 are well above the national average.
- Those pupils who join the school below the expected levels for their age make progress at a faster rate than their peers, enabling many of them to catch up and achieve good passes in English and mathematics.
- The progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is **exceptional**.
- Relationships in the school are very good. Pupils are happy at school and appreciate the purposeful atmosphere in the classrooms.

Quality of teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy

The quality of teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy is **outstanding**.

- Pupils spoke highly of the quality of teaching they receive in English and mathematics, and across the school as a whole.
- Teachers are effective in supporting literacy in their marking of work and in their emphasis on key words within learning contexts but elsewhere opportunities to promote literacy skills are often missed in lessons.
- The widespread use of information and communication technology (ICT) supports both literacy and numeracy.
- The quality of marking of pupils' work is very good. Pupils find the feedback they receive very helpful.
- Targets are used extremely well in teaching. Frequent and purposeful assessment helps pupils understand exactly what they have achieved and what they need to do to meet their challenging targets.
- As a mathematics and computing specialist school, numeracy is given a high profile. However, the numeracy across the curriculum policy is in need of review and evaluation.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum for literacy and numeracy is **outstanding**.

- Setting and small group sizes enable pupils at risk of not reaching the expected level of attainment to make **outstanding** progress.
- The timetable gives priority to English and mathematics lessons, so that they take place at times most likely to benefit pupils' progress.
- At certain times of the year, the timetable is re-arranged for pupils approaching tests and examinations and alternative, flexible lesson arrangements are implemented to match pupils' needs. Some older pupils benefit from revised personal timetables.
- Additional lessons at lunchtimes, after school and in the holidays are provided to support pupils in preparation for their tests and examinations.

- There is a wide range of further intervention strategies to promote literacy and numeracy. These include planned activities at registration time, the support of individuals who need extra support with literacy or numeracy, book boxes for tutor groups, and access to on-line learning programmes.
- Literacy is promoted through writing competitions and the literacy week.

Leadership and management of literacy and numeracy

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

- There has been a determined focus on raising standards within a caring environment which has been **outstandingly** successful in recent years.
- Within this drive to improve and sustain high standards there is a clear priority being given by the senior leadership of the school to literacy and numeracy. This has resulted, for example, in the school becoming a mathematics and computing specialist school.
- The uncompromising target setting, frequent assessment and monitoring, and the immediate use of a range of interventions for pupils not making the expected progress, combine to create a learning environment which has the highest expectations of all pupils.
- The assertive mentoring strategy, which benefits all pupils, ensures that each individual during the key times of their school career receives continual monitoring and support.
- In planning for the introduction of functional skills the school is demonstrating its determination to continue its success and retain its focus on literacy and numeracy.
- Literacy and numeracy are seen as the province of the English and mathematics departments. These departments are successful, as results indicate, although the promotion and support of literacy and numeracy in other subjects is less well developed.

English as an additional language

There are no pupils who are currently learning English as an additional language.

Inclusion

Inclusion in literacy and numeracy is **outstanding**.

- Hurworth is a highly inclusive school, in which each individual pupil is known and valued. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are fully integrated into the life of the school. All pupils receive excellent care, guidance and support.
- Attendance is consistently above the national average.
- There are high levels of participation in the various kinds of enrichment and extra curricular opportunities that the school provides.
- Strategies to reduce the number of fixed term exclusions are proving effective.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- review and revise the various literacy initiatives of recent years in order to clarify expectations for teachers and departments across the school
- consider the development of monitoring and guidance strategies to support the promotion of literacy across the curriculum
- review and evaluate the numeracy across the curriculum policy and consider establishing a more systematic method for supporting and guiding teachers and departments in their delivery of numeracy skills within their 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

Bob Roberts
Additional Inspector