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Mrs A Crompton  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Crompton

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 5-6 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 students 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 students 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 students and senior managers, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of seven lessons and visits to other settings.

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

- The attainment of students when they join the school in Year 7 is broadly average in English and mathematics.
- The proportion of students who achieve five or more good passes at GCSE is consistently high. The proportion whose five or more good passes include English and mathematics has risen far faster than the national rate of improvement and is well above average.
- Those students who join the school below the expected levels for their age make progress at a faster rate than their peers, especially the boys, enabling many of them to catch up and obtain good GCSE passes in English and mathematics.
- Relationships in the school are very good.

### Quality of teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy

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

- Students expressed a highly positive view of their teachers, the relevance and enjoyment of the work they do, and the help they receive.
- Teachers make excellent use of information and communication technology. Their preparation of materials and the selection of staged, progressive tasks meet the needs of students extremely well.
- Literacy is promoted across the curriculum whereas the school puts numeracy development largely in the hands of its outstanding mathematics department.
- Training events for staff at Middleton are innovative and exceptionally well organised.
- Marking of students' work is good.

### Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum for literacy and numeracy is good.

- The curriculum in English and mathematics enables students to make good progress in developing their literacy and numeracy skills.
- Schemes of work are well adapted to suit the well-established setting arrangements in English and mathematics. Teachers are deployed carefully so that their skills and experience match the needs of students.
- Curriculum 'pathways' for Years 10 and 11 in Key Stage 4 allow for the needs of individual students to be met well.
- Early GCSE examination entry for English and mathematics in November of Year 11, together with flexible timetable arrangements afterwards, allows for more intensive provision for those students capable of good passes but not yet achieving them.
- There are a number of additional intervention and support strategies provided by the English and mathematics departments that help students with literacy and numeracy.

- The curriculum has no specific adaptations for those very few students with English as an additional language. They are effectively supported by individual arrangements such as teaching assistant support.

### Leadership and management of literacy and numeracy

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

- There is an uncompromising commitment from you and your leadership team to raise achievement for all groups of students. This includes a particular focus on literacy and numeracy.
- This focus is effectively translated into actions. These actions include the appointment of a literacy coordinator, a focus on literacy in the monitoring teaching and learning, and the high priority given to a reading strategy.
- The effectiveness of assessment, target-setting and review can be seen in outstanding achievement throughout the school.
- There is very good leadership within the English and mathematics departments.
- The school's literacy coordinator has been well-supported in her role by the senior leadership team. There is a well-established and active literacy group drawn from across the school which has facilitated a number of initiatives. The school is yet to establish how to sustain a focus on key elements of literacy provision.

### English as an additional language

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

- There are very few students who join the school new to English (only five students). Those who do so have their needs met effectively as their particular circumstances require a variety of arrangements. They are making good progress.
- The school's special educational needs coordinator is responsible for identifying and supporting any students for whom English is an additional language. The arrangements made are effective in meeting the current level of need. Where appropriate, teachers are made aware of the needs of students and are supported.
- No member of staff has particular expertise, qualifications or training in this field. There has been no whole staff training as this has not been perceived by the school as necessary.

### Inclusion

Inclusion in literacy and numeracy is outstanding.

- The well-established inclusion centre, managed by an assistant headteacher responsible for inclusion, provides a range of support mechanisms for vulnerable students.
- Inclusion strategies are arranged well to meet the individual needs of students.
- The school recognises very effectively the correlation between those who are at risk and vulnerable and those who have literacy and numeracy needs.
- Attendance is well above the national average.
- Assessment and monitoring arrangements are thorough and inclusive.
- The proportion of students achieving five or more passes at GCSE is very high, and above the national average, reflecting the continuing engagement in education of the overwhelming majority.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- considering ways in which a strategy for literacy across the curriculum can be developed and sustained.

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 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