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Mr P Dahlstrom
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Dahlstrom

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 14 and 15 February 2011 to look at work in English.

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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of 10 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is outstanding.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is outstanding.

- In 2010, the average attainment in English at the end of Key Stages 1 to 3 ranged from P scale 2 to 8. At the end of Key Stage 4 the average was National Curriculum Level 1. In the further education unit, most pupils gain entry level credits in literacy.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage children make excellent progress in learning to communicate about themselves and their preferences. For example, pupils unable to verbalise were able to choose what they wanted for breakfast by using symbols and pictures on a communication aid. Pupils successfully develop early communication skills, for example through songs and stories supported by signing and symbol cards.

- Pupils make good progress within or through the P scales and some make exemplary progress. They make small but significant steps in their ability to give attention to and respond to sensory experiences and to express preferences. They make incremental progress in making marks and in understanding speech, signs, symbols and words.
- All pupils are attentive and listen well to each other and adults. They enjoy and respond well to the wide range of stimulation and guidance that they are given. The most able pupils at each key stage make excellent progress in learning to read and write words and simple sentences independently. Older pupils are successful in applying their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills in situations that are useful to them in life outside school.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is outstanding.

- Teachers are enthusiastic and work with a high level of expertise to promote communication and literacy. The work of teaching assistants makes an excellent contribution to the team delivery of each lesson. Sequences of activity are sharply focused and short and the pace of lessons is consistently high. Stories are used very effectively as a vehicle for framing and giving meaning to sensory teaching and learning.
- The use of assessment is excellent. Staff have a detailed knowledge of each pupil's skills. Each lesson is precise and personal in meeting the differing needs of each pupil. All staff take a high level of responsibility for moving each pupil on. They meticulously observe and record progress in lessons. Pupils' work is carefully marked and annotated. Pupils are given good opportunities to show their own achievements.
- An imaginative range of resources stimulates pupils' senses and their ability to communicate. Story-telling using tactile and other media is exceptionally well resourced and provides an enjoyable and intense experience for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). Staff are very well trained in a wide range of communication aids. Staff and parents communicate with each other very effectively about pupils' experiences and development.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is outstanding.

- The curriculum provides a rich and relevant experience for pupils at each level of learning difficulty. Topics match pupils' ages and interests. Literacy and communication are at the core of all topics and are continuously reinforced and developed. Assessment criteria are used rigorously to inform curriculum planning. The sensory curriculum provides creative experiences which encourage pupils with PMLD to use their available senses for communication. The early years, primary and secondary English curriculum is successfully taught alongside the sensory curriculum.

- The signing system, picture symbol system and the software for making symbols are highly successful in augmenting communication and providing alternative methods for pupils to understand and respond. Staff work closely with speech and other therapists to ensure that therapeutic and language development strategies reinforce each other. Pupils enjoy a wide range of stories, poetry, drama, and non-fiction texts.
- The integration of the Nursery with mainstream provision provides pupils with excellent role models and opportunities for communication. The community library and café provide an excellent resource for older pupils to learn and practise their communication skills. The integrated provision for ages 0 to 19 provides high levels of continuity in the development of communication.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English and communication are outstanding.

- Senior leaders and leaders at each key stage have a coherent vision for the development of communication and literacy. They continuously develop ways of extending the opportunities for pupils to communicate more effectively. The school's use of its multi-sensory studio has acquired a national reputation for innovation.
- The use of assessment and target-setting is rigorous and comprehensive. Assessment monitors small and significant developments in communication in all classes. The school has recently developed detailed frameworks for monitoring early communication skills. The school has identified the need for finer measures of progress and for greater clarity in the methods for evaluating overall progress.
- Senior leaders rigorously evaluate patterns in the assessment of English and act effectively to tackle any emerging issues. For example, the school identified slower progress in reading which was tackled promptly by improving the range of books, especially for older boys. A weakness in writing at Key Stage 2 was improved by a range of carefully identified strategies, including finer motor skill activities and resources to develop talk for writing.
- High-quality and systematic training in visual support strategies, signing and communication aids ensure that all staff have relevant and up-to-date skills. The school plays a lead role in training and coaching staff in mainstream schools who teach pupils with complex communication needs.

Areas for improvement, which the school recognises, include:

- further developing the fine measurement of pupils' progress and the methods for evaluating pupils' overall progress.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop English and communication in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Bernard Campbell
Her Majesty's Inspector