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Mr A Fawkes
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mr Fawkes

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 25 January 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 three lessons and a shorter phonics session.

The overall effectiveness of English is satisfactory.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is satisfactory.

- Attainment at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 is close to the national average. Although a gap exists between standards in reading and writing, this is in line with the average trend.
- Children's communication and literacy skills are below expectations on entry to the school. Progress across the school in English is uneven, as confirmed by recent contextual value-added figures, but satisfactory overall. Boys and girls make similar rates of progress. More able pupils tend to do better than some other groups and an average number of pupils achieve the higher levels by the end of Year 6. However, lower attaining pupils and those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities have made more limited progress proportionately in recent years.

- Evidence from externally moderated teachers' assessments in 2010 showed signs of improved performance in English.
- Progress in lessons observed was satisfactory. Pupils behaved well and were keen to learn. On a number of occasions, pupils spontaneously provided good support for each other and worked well together. Pupils were not always confident in discussions or when asked to express their own opinions.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory.

- In discussion, pupils were mostly neutral about English. They stated that there were times when lessons failed to engage their interest, especially where there appeared to be a lack of variety with too much emphasis on writing. They were keen for more opportunities to use group work and drama in lessons.
- Strengths in the lessons observed included good relationships with pupils and effective classroom management. Planning was thorough and at times classroom assistants were used very effectively to work with identified groups of pupils. Activities were potentially lively and effective. Clear evidence was found of a strong whole-school emphasis on differentiation and teachers worked hard to provide well-matched tasks and support for groups of pupils.
- This emphasis on differentiation sometimes meant that lessons became over-complicated or that the early teaching did not prepare all pupils for their subsequent tasks. While teachers chose lively activities, they did not always consider how these activities would best enhance pupils' learning. Opportunities were missed at times to model writing for pupils.
- Assessment in English is good. The quality of marking is above average and mostly consistent across the school. Most teachers respond to pupils' work in some detail and are clear about areas for improvement. As a result, pupils understand their current level of attainment in writing and know what they need to do to improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- The programme is planned well across the school and developing links with the new thematic approach in the Foundation subjects. It is closely based on guidance from the Primary National Strategy. Phonics is taught systematically to younger pupils and the school has introduced a phonics, spelling and grammar programme to supplement this for Key Stage 2 pupils.
- The reading curriculum enables most pupils to achieve and/or exceed national expectations. Pupils enjoy reading and a systematic approach to reading homework establishes good links with parents.

- Some innovative features include the extension of phonics and spelling work into Key Stage 2. The curriculum is currently only moderately successful at engaging pupils' interest. Too few opportunities are given at present for pupils to develop speaking, listening or drama in a consistent way. Although information and communication technology is used regularly in English work, pupils are less often involved with media work or moving-image technology. The work scrutiny confirmed that some pupils do not complete sufficient extended writing. Opportunities are not always developed to provide pupils with contexts and audiences for English beyond the classroom.
- The curriculum is enriched by visits from local theatre groups and a range of visits and visitors. Pupils speak enthusiastically of ventures such as reading and film clubs although these are not operating at present.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are satisfactory.

- As you know, the considerable instability in staffing over the past year or so has affected both senior and middle leadership. The current temporary leadership team has identified clearly some immediate priorities, especially in monitoring and reviewing individual pupils' progress. There is a clear impetus for improvement.
- A new programme of monitoring and evaluation has been put in place. Some effective monitoring in English has taken place in recent years. This includes reviews of teachers' plans and pupil work samples, as well as good moderating procedures. These activities have given good feedback to staff supported by some structured lesson observations.
- Senior leaders have an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses and have identified some appropriate actions for improvement, although there is too little specificity about how to enhance the consistency of teaching.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the quality of teaching in English across the school, including a closer link between the tasks chosen and outcomes for pupils, and reviewing the most effective approaches to planning for differentiation
- engaging pupils more enthusiastically in English lessons by providing clearer contexts and audiences for English work together with greater variety, including more consistent opportunities for speaking and listening, drama, moving image work, and extended writing.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop English 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

Philip Jarrett
Her Majesty's Inspector