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Mrs H Green
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Green

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 24 May 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 students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is satisfactory and improving.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is satisfactory.

- Attainment has been broadly average at the end of Key Stage 2 in recent years. Although the proportion of pupils reaching average standards slipped in 2010, this was largely because the year group contained a substantial number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Indeed, the number of pupils who achieved the higher Level 5 rose markedly and was above national average.
- Standards of writing have improved considerably in recent years. The 2010 results suggest that pupils perform as well in writing as they do in reading. Standards of writing were high in some of the classes observed during the inspection. The school has also worked successfully in recent years to narrow the gap between boys' and girls' attainment in English.

- Performance data from the past few years show that progress in English has been satisfactory. This is confirmed by the average proportion of pupils making the expected levels of progress from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2. However, the progress of many pupils is now good in writing.
- Pupils are polite, friendly and keen to learn. They behave well in class and work positively together. They enjoy both reading and writing. The good standard of presentation in books confirms the care that they take with work. Progress was satisfactory overall in the lessons observed but with very strong progress in writing in the most effective lessons.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory.

- Teaching in lessons observed was variable. Relationships were good and lessons were well planned with clear objectives. Writing was especially well taught in the Key Stage 2 lessons observed. The features of this very good practice included: effective teacher modelling; a strong emphasis on pupils' editing and redrafting their work; very clear feedback from teachers; and good use of time for pupils to work on their writing.
- Where lessons were not as strong, there was an emphasis on activities that engaged pupils but did not always consolidate their learning. At times, more support was needed for weaker writers.
- Most pupils enjoy English. They like the variety in lessons, 'fun' activities, and the support provided for individual pupils. A few pupils felt that topics lasted too long and that this affected their concentration.
- Marking has improved substantially since the previous whole-school inspection. The quality of the very best marking is now outstanding. This marking includes a detailed and thoughtful response to pupils' work, together with helpful ideas for further improvement. While not all marking is of this quality, overall it is good. Teachers also make effective use of opportunities for pupils to review their own work.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- The curriculum is innovative and strongly based around pupils' needs and interests. It aims to 'guarantee' that all pupils have certain experiences, such as theatre visits. Developments to the whole curriculum have been well planned and involved discussions with both staff and pupils. The curriculum engages pupils well; they are very positive about both reading and writing.
- The curriculum is broader than in many schools with good opportunities for drama work and the use of information and communication technology, including movie image work. There is a very effective curriculum for writing and well-planned action for improving the breadth of the reading curriculum.

- Very good partnerships enhance the curriculum in English. Links with other local schools are strong and include support with drama from the local secondary school. Good use is made of local libraries both for visits by pupils and to encourage wider reading through shadowing book awards. The school takes part in an effective local Poet Laureate scheme. In addition, there are opportunities for drama and theatre work, as well as visits by authors. These activities support the curriculum very well.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is satisfactory, with good features.

- Senior leaders have worked hard to maintain and improve provision in English at a time when there has been much turbulence in staffing, with added difficulties in recruitment. This includes the absence of subject leaders in English during the present year. Despite this, real progress has been made in certain areas, including substantial improvements in teaching writing and the quality of marking.
- The school's self-evaluation in the subject is accurate and realistic. Senior leaders have a good awareness of strengths and areas for further improvement. Action plans are comprehensive and include a very effective agenda for tackling weaknesses in reading, although there is scope to simplify and clarify the plans.
- A strong vision guides the work of the school and there is a clear emphasis on the need to raise standards further. Pupils' progress is monitored well through regular reviews with teachers and targeted one-to-one support has been effective in raising standards in writing. Regular lesson observations provide helpful feedback to staff although the emphasis on learning and progress is not always sufficiently strong in observation records. Links with other local schools include some imaginative opportunities to receive additional, external feedback.
- The capacity for further improvement is good. This reflects recent improvements in English. Senior staff have provided good leadership in the absence of the subject leaders.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 by:
 - using existing good practice in teaching to improve the quality of teaching across the school
 - reviewing and strengthening subject leadership
 - driving through changes to reading in line with the school's English action plan.

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