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Mrs J Cousins
Headteacher
Sir Alexander Fleming Primary School
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Dear Mrs Cousins

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 20 October 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 five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is good.

- Children enter the Nursery with skills in communication, language and learning that are well below national expectations. They make strong progress in learning to communicate and in using phonics, though fewer learn to apply these skills to their own reading and writing. By the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, their skills are close to national expectations.
- As a result of the outstanding progress at Key Stage 1, standards in reading and writing have risen over the last three years to reach the national average by the end of Year 2. In 2011, Year 2 pupils eligible for free school meals made up the majority of the year group. They achieved exceptionally well to reach national averages in reading and writing.

- Attainment has risen steadily at the end of Key Stage 2. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress and the proportion gaining at least Level 4 is average. The proportion of pupils that gained the higher Level 5 increased markedly in 2011, but remains below the national average.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- Observed lessons combined an imaginative stimulus with a precise focus on the learning of a particular skill. At Key Stage 2, video interviews with staff provided a rich source for writing a biography about the caretaker. High levels of enjoyment led to good motivation and sustained concentration. Activities were varied, fun and practical. They were conducted at a good pace and had a clear focus on what was being learnt. Good use was made of talking partners and whiteboards to develop thinking, speaking and note-making. Good guidance for developing writing was displayed on classroom walls and tables. On occasion, the teaching in mixed-age classes did not sufficiently meet the needs of all levels of ability.
- Teaching assistants are well-organised and play a highly effective role in leading small groups. They use questions and explanations well to develop pupils' skills in reading and writing, especially the lower achievers and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Targets guide pupils well on how to improve. Frequent assessment identifies underachievement. Prompt action is taken and its impact is regularly evaluated. One-to-one support contributes well to accelerating the pupils' progress. Marking is frequent and generally high quality. Good use of 'close the gap' marking prompts children to correct weaknesses. A few examples of marking lacked precision and there was some inconsistency in the use of the 'close the gap' marking.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- The imaginative approaches, stimulating range of resources and a clear focus on basic literacy skills enable pupils to make good progress. Spoken activities are used well to develop skills and confidence in self-expression. The systematic approach to phonics ensures good progress in literacy. Extensive use is made of visitors and visits to extend pupils' experience and to provide meaningful contexts for language development. Cross-curricular topic work provides good opportunities to extend pupils literacy skills in different subjects.
- Pupils' enthusiasm for writing has increased with the recent introduction of sessions for extended writing. Imaginative use is made of information and communication technology, including video, although poetry is less well-developed. The continuity of pupils' learning and progress is documented

well in each pupil's portfolio. This method encourages a wide variety of reading and writing activities and good standards of presentation.

- Pupils enjoy reading and appreciate the encouragement to read for pleasure both at school and at home with parents and carers. Guided reading and regular opportunities for reading with an adult, have increased rates of progress in reading.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is outstanding.

- Leaders and managers have successfully brought about sustained improvement in attainment and progress. The rigorous assessment and evaluation of pupils' progress have led to systematic and effective action to improve learning. The development of a creative curriculum has increased the quality of learning in English.
- Leaders communicate a clear vision for learning. Teamwork across the phases and between teaching and support staff is strong. Class teachers take responsibility for monitoring and accounting for the progress of their pupils. Plans are well-formulated and specific. The impact of actions is reviewed systematically and priorities re-focused when necessary. The well-focused scrutiny of books and lesson observations draws on external expertise. Feedback is used skilfully by leaders and managers to identify actions for staff to improve pupils' learning. Staff performance is reviewed systematically and leads to specific improvements in the teaching of English.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- further raising the attainment of more able pupils and ensuring that teaching is consistently well-matched to the ability of all learners.

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

As 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Bernard Campbell
Her Majesty's Inspector