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Mrs T Austin  
Headteacher  
Southdown Junior School  
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Dear Mrs Austin

### **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 26 January 2012 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; observations of four lessons with additional short visits to phonic sessions and guided reading lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is satisfactory.

### **Achievement in English**

Achievement in English is satisfactory.

- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 was below the national average in 2011 and particularly low for boys. Current attainment is variable across year groups. Attainment in reading is above writing.
- Progress overall is satisfactory. Progress for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is good because effective support enables them to achieve well, relative to their starting points.
- There are pockets of underachievement particularly in writing. Progress in writing lags behind reading in all year groups and boys do less well than girls. Insufficient emphasis is given to the quality of presentation and standards of handwriting.

- Pupils say they enjoy English lessons. They behave well and generally have positive attitudes to learning. They particularly like the topic-based approach to the curriculum, which includes activities such as freeze frames, drama and role play.

### **Quality of teaching in English**

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory.

- Although teaching is satisfactory overall, there were a number of strengths in the lessons observed. The best lessons are well structured and move at a swift pace. Opportunities are provided for pupils to discuss their learning and share their ideas. In one lesson, for example, pupils were preparing to write personalised balanced arguments linked to whether or not to embark on a voyage around the world. Pupils discussed their ideas in pairs and groups and produced well thought-out ideas. The effective questioning and challenge by the class teacher enabled pupils to gain a good insight into the use of language to create effects. As a result, pupils were motivated to learn and made good progress. However, this is not always the case. In some lessons observed, insufficient pace in learning and limited questioning to challenge pupils inhibited progress.
- The quality of lesson planning is variable. The most effective plans are detailed with tasks which are suitably matched to meet the differing learning needs of all groups of pupils. However, some lesson planning does not make sufficient use of assessment information to plan interesting and challenging tasks, and this limits the pupils' progress.
- Work is marked regularly. However, the quality is variable and pupils are not provided with sufficient information about how to improve their work. Targets for improvement are devised for individual pupils, but these are not systematically applied and are not used effectively enough to enable pupils to monitor their own progress.

### **Quality of the curriculum in English**

The quality of the curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- The curriculum provides a good balance, covering all aspects of English. Successful connections are made between subjects across the curriculum, to engage pupils and meet their needs and interests, particularly the boys. Good links to appropriate texts related to the themes, with visits to places of interest, enhance the curriculum. For example, pupils spoke enthusiastically about the Second World War theme, where a visit to the steam museum at Swindon and the story of *Goodnight Mr Tom* were used effectively to help pupils to understand about evacuation during the war.
- Provision for reading is improving, including targeted work for ability groups to accelerate progress. All pupils are encouraged to read at home.
- The curriculum provides a good range of opportunities for writing in other subjects. However, pupils have limited opportunities to use their skills in extended and independent writing.

## **Effectiveness of leadership and management in English**

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is satisfactory.

- The school has a wealth of assessment information and the monitoring of pupils' attainment and progress is used well to set priorities. However, although suitable priorities, actions and timescales have been identified, it is unclear how the success of actions will be measured. Currently, they are not related to specific outcomes for pupils.
- Policies in English are in place, but they are not systematically monitored to ensure consistency in provision across the school. In addition, the monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning lacks rigour. As a result, weaknesses in teaching remain.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- raising attainment and improving pupils' progress, particularly in writing by:
  - using assessment information more sharply to plan lessons that meet the needs of all pupils
  - providing more opportunities for pupils to develop their extended and independent writing skills, and to improve their presentation and handwriting skills
- enhancing the quality of teaching by:
  - ensuring the pace and challenge of work appropriately engages all pupils in their learning
  - improving the use of questioning to develop pupils' understanding and their active participation
  - improving the quality and consistency of marking and making more effective use of targets to guide pupils and to help them monitor their own progress
- increasing the effectiveness of leaders and managers by:
  - identifying specific, measurable success criteria in strategic planning which focus on improving outcomes for pupils
  - ensuring that there is rigorous and effective monitoring of the quality of teaching to eliminate weaknesses.

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

**Ann Henderson**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**