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Mrs A MacGregor
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs MacGregor

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 5 March 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; and observation of seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is satisfactory.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is satisfactory.

- In 2011, overall attainment at the end of Year 6 rose to be significantly above average, with boys outperforming girls in English. Assessments prior to entry to the school suggest that many pupils enter with relatively high reading and writing levels, so this level of attainment represents satisfactory progress overall. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress and are well supported by adults and other pupils. They benefit from carefully targeted interventions such as one-to-one reading support and small-group teaching.
- All pupils have a daily phonics session because assessment at the start of the year showed spelling to be a widespread weakness. Good progress was seen in a group of Year 4 and Year 5 pupils who showed a sense of

achievement in being able to link letters and sounds, and blend sounds into familiar words.

- Pupils' written work shows clearest progress being made by pupils of low and middle prior attainment, with less able pupils in Year 5, for example, progressing from short and disjointed paragraphs to more extended, legible and thoughtfully structured writing on a range of topics. Most pupils think of progress in terms of skills, with less attention paid to imagination, ideas and style.
- Pupils' behaviour is excellent. They have positive attitudes to learning and clearly enjoy English, although they do not find it as challenging as other subjects. In lessons, they are encouraged to collaborate and to assess their own and others' work, using clear guidelines. The emphasis is on mutual encouragement and pupils are not routinely asked how work could be better. More able pupils are not often challenged to develop their thinking beyond an initial response and to be independent and inventive. However, pupils identified as gifted in English benefit from events shared with other schools, and some can produce examples of imaginative and confident writing; for example, 'The tiny pebbles on the beach laze around like golf balls, while the pale faces of the Seven Sisters stare solemnly out to sea. The waving ocean walks back and forth along the shores of Cuckmere Haven.'

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory.

- The impact of whole-staff training and individual support is reflected in: lesson planning that establishes what is to be learnt and sets out strategies to support differing needs and learning styles; effective questioning skills; well-managed pair and group work; and confident use of resources. Teachers and support staff have good relationships with pupils. In several lessons, visual prompts, for example pictures of Tudor ships and an atmospheric illustration from a storybook, were well used to stimulate discussion and provide material for pupils' writing.
- Most marking is thorough and balances praise with specific guidance – generally focusing on spelling, punctuation, sentence construction and presentation.
- Where teaching is less effective, pupils are over-directed, with limited scope for decision-making and invention. Opportunities to extend discussion and explore avenues suggested by pupils' responses are not fully exploited.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- The curriculum has very recently been revised. It aims to enliven pupils' writing through memorable first-hand experiences at the start of each unit, for example, trips to a local forest and the south coast. A topic-based

approach encourages pupils to try out different forms of writing across subjects. 'The life, times and wives of Henry VIII' is an especially productive unit. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through topics such as the life of Gandhi and Victorian England.

- Daily guided reading sessions are well organised and successfully encourage pupils to read for pleasure. The newly established library, in which Year 6 pupils act as librarians, is becoming a well-used resource.
- Mainstream English is well complemented by activities such as visiting writers, drama workshops, overnight trips - on *The Golden Hinde*, for example - and an annual storytelling competition.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is satisfactory.

- You and the subject leader share an ambitious vision for English as the centre of a creative curriculum and as a medium through which attainment will be driven up. Well-chosen approaches include: concentrated staff training; assessment strategies to be used by all; liaison with an outstanding primary school; and systematic monitoring of pupils' work. Strong foundations are being laid down for further improvement.
- Senior leaders acknowledge that systematic monitoring of teaching is still being developed. Currently, members of the senior leadership team build up an overall view of teaching through frequent but brief 'drop-in' observations.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- making more of opportunities for pupils to be inventive and independent in their thinking and in their response to texts
- having consistently high expectations so that all pupils, including the more able, are challenged to be innovative and independent.

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

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector