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Mr T Markham
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Markham

Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 24 April 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is good.

- The school has a pattern of significantly above average attainment at the end of Key Stage 2. In 2011, nine out of every 10 Year 6 pupils gained at least Level 4. The proportion of pupils, both boys and girls, gaining Level 5 was twice the national average.
- All pupils made expected progress in English. Those known to be eligible for free schools meals achieved as well as similar pupils nationally and progressed at much the same rate as their school contemporaries. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs gaining Level 5 was well above the national average, demonstrating that these pupils respond as effectively to high expectations and well-judged challenge as others in the school.

- Pupils' work in lessons and in their books reinforces this picture of above average attainment and good progress. Frequent and detailed monitoring of progress, moderated by senior leaders and the local authority, shows pupils across the ability range meeting ambitious targets. A prompt response to signs of weakness in Year 4 writing has had a positive impact.
- Pupils are keen to do well and they enjoy English. 'We all love reading!' agreed Year 5 and Year 6 boys and girls. In each year, most read aloud accurately and with understanding. Pupils are clear about their personal targets and monitor their own progress carefully. As a Year 5 pupil explained, 'We're using our targets. When we show we've met one three times, we then get a new one. You know what you need to do to get better.'
- Those identified as gifted and talented show initiative in driving projects that complement the mainstream curriculum. Year 4 pupils, for example, explained, 'As a group, we decided to challenge ourselves.' Out of this grew *The Weekly Bomb* – a highly effective evocation of an issue of a 1941 newspaper for their area.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- Pupils have justified confidence in their teachers: 'They understand us.' 'They make learning fun – but they still stick to their task.' Teaching strengths include: enthusiastically shared subject knowledge; a readiness to try new approaches and adapt lesson plans to meet pupils' current priorities; and a lively pace.
- Lessons were also characterised by; generally effective questioning skills; confident use of varied resources; modelling of good practice in speaking and writing; and marking that is thorough and constructive. In a Year 3 class, the teacher and teaching assistant were entertaining and helpful in demonstrating how to put together a sequence of 'freeze frames' with explanations to demonstrate aspects of ancient Egyptian science and technology. Pupils then tackled the task with confidence. They had 'skimmed and scanned' to find the information they needed and debated which items were important enough to be included. Their next challenge was to orchestrate their findings into a coherent presentation.
- Learning is less effective when teachers accept pupils' first responses, rather than challenging them to develop their ideas. While much group work is highly productive, on occasion teachers leave a group unmonitored for too long and pupils become restless or do not engage constructively with the task set. Activities in guided reading sessions do not consistently engage and challenge pupils, especially the more able.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is good with outstanding features.

- The still-evolving curriculum is a particular strength. Care is taken to cover National Curriculum requirements within a lively and flexible approach that has been shaped by the need to engage boys in reading and writing. The school's *Hooks and Outcomes* format is accessible to all pupils, combining development of literacy skills with opportunities for creative work in a range of media, including film and animation. Pupils' books show responses to a variety of texts and work in a range of genre.
- A theme-based approach promotes pupils' appreciation of the importance of literacy skills across subjects. Pupils take for granted that choice of vocabulary, sentence structure, spelling and punctuation are keys to success in all subjects. Whole-school reading initiatives and awards have successfully motivated pupils across the ability and age range. Many units of study, such as 'Training a dragon', successfully combine reading, extended writing, drama, animation and film-making.
- The mainstream curriculum is exceptionally well complemented by trips and expeditions, collaboration with practitioners – journalists, writers and theatre groups – and the involvement of parents and other adults. Input by a father with space science expertise has been especially successful in stimulating discussion and writing.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is good.

- With strong support from governors, you and your deputy promote a persuasive and ambitious vision for English. A focus on teaching is driving improvement. Systematic monitoring sets priorities for staff development and for action to tackle underachievement. Morale is strong.
- The two subject leaders communicate well-informed enthusiasm and a practical as well as creative approach to curriculum development both of English as a discrete discipline and of literacy across subjects. They model good practice in their teaching and use of assessment and in their openness to new ideas and resources to enhance the curriculum.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that:
 - all pupils are actively and constructively involved when working in groups
 - guided reading activities consistently both engage and challenge pupils.

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