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10 May 2012

Mrs C Dickinson  
Headteacher  
The Castle Primary School  
Barrington Street  
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Devon  
EX16 6QR

Dear Mrs Dickinson

### **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 3 May 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 four lessons and three phonic sessions.

The overall effectiveness of English is satisfactory.

### **Achievement in English**

Achievement in English is satisfactory.

- Attainment at the end of Year 6 has been below the national average for five years. However, the recent introduction of strategies to accelerate pupils' progress and raise attainment is beginning to take effect. As a result, pupils' progress is improving. The school's own data show that current Year 6 pupils are in line to achieve levels of attainment that are broadly in line with those found nationally.
- Children begin in the Reception classes with skills and abilities that are below those found nationally. Their language and communication skills are particularly low. The introduction of the systematic teaching of letters and sounds is supporting children to develop the ability to tackle text and develop early reading skills successfully.

- Pupils enjoy learning because teachers make lessons interesting and meaningful, with good use of relevant texts and visits to stimulate learning.
- A wide range of intervention strategies and support for underachieving pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities enables these pupils to make similar progress to their peers.

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

The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory.

- The teaching observed ranged from satisfactory to good. No inadequate teaching was seen. However, teaching is not consistent enough to enable all pupils to make good progress. In addition, more able pupils are not always provided with sufficient challenge or enough opportunities to develop their independence.
- The recent professional development provided for teachers is supporting effective strategies to assess pupils' writing. Weaknesses are identified through writing assessments and suitable targets are set to enable pupils to know more clearly what they need to do to improve. However, inconsistencies remain in the implementation and monitoring of targets across the school.
- Teachers use paired talk well to enable pupils to rehearse their thinking. Role play and drama are also used to good effect, supporting pupils' engagement in learning.

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

The quality of the curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is suitably broad and balanced with cross-curricular themes planned each half term. This encompasses opportunities for learning through poetry, plays, fiction and non-fiction texts. Year 4 pupils particularly enjoyed the story of '*The three fishing brothers gruff*' and enthusiastically joined in role play and drama activities linked to the story.
- There is some variability in the teaching of handwriting and spelling. The recently introduced method of teaching handwriting using a cursive style is having a positive impact on the quality of handwriting for younger pupils. However, pupils have limited opportunities to improve their handwriting and spelling skills.
- A broad range of enrichment activities is provided which includes visits to places of interest and opportunities for outdoor learning such as the Forest School. Provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities ensures that they have full access to learning. This is particularly the case for the small number of pupils with severe and complex needs.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is satisfactory.

- Senior leaders are fully committed to raising achievement and have recently introduced a range of strategies to improve pupils' progress. However, these are at an early stage of development and at present inconsistencies remain in the implementation of new policies.
- Recent initiatives in writing are supporting teachers to plan to meet the learning needs of different groups of pupils more effectively. However, not all lessons are planned precisely enough to accelerate the progress of some groups, particularly the more able. Ongoing assessments of reading and speaking and listening are less well developed.
- There is a determined effort to develop consistent approaches to planning, marking, assessment and the classroom environment. This was evident in classrooms where displays build on and extend what pupils already know. The new marking system is welcomed by pupils who now have a clearer understanding of how to improve their work.

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

- raising attainment and accelerating pupils' progress in English by:
  - developing effective policies, including assessment procedures, which are consistently implemented
  - using assessment information to plan more sharply to meet the learning needs of all pupils
  - providing more opportunities for pupils to develop good handwriting and spelling skills
  - increasing the independence of more able pupils so that they can demonstrate more securely higher levels of attainment.

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**