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Mrs M Dodgson
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Dodgson

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 25 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; observation of four lessons; and a learning walk.

The overall effectiveness of English is inadequate.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is inadequate.

- The large majority of children start in the Reception class with skills in communication, language and literacy that are in line with age-related expectations. Pupils' progress in English overall is too slow and the standards they reach at the end of Year 6 are below the national average. Their achievement has been adversely affected by significant disruption to staffing.
- Pupils make very slow progress up to the age of seven and reach levels in reading and writing that are consistently below those found nationally. This has been the picture over the last few years. No pupils have achieved the higher Level 3 in reading or writing in the past five years. The pupils currently in Key Stage 1 are working at levels below those expected for their age.

- Although progress improves across Key Stage 2, it remains inadequate for more able pupils, especially in writing.
- Learning and progress were inadequate in half of the lessons observed. Pupils' attitudes to learning are generally positive but teaching does not always capitalise on their willingness to learn by ensuring that they spend sufficient time practising the basic skills of phonics, reading, writing and spelling. Work in books is often of a poor standard particularly in terms of presentation and handwriting.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is inadequate.

- The quality of teaching varies across the school. Some lessons observed were inadequate. In the more effective lessons, staff used resources well. For example, in a good lesson observed with Year 5 and Year 6 pupils, the teacher's use of photographs taken in a recent drama lesson motivated the pupils well and deepened their understanding and ability to describe a character's emotions and thoughts, leading to some effective writing.
- In weaker lessons, the tasks set did not match pupils' ability and subject knowledge was weak. Other weaknesses in some lessons included low expectations and insufficient time for pupils to complete tasks. Teachers' questioning did not develop pupils' understanding well enough to promote good learning and in some cases confused the pupils.
- The work in pupils' exercise books is of variable quality and often incomplete. Insufficient emphasis is placed on presentation. Teachers do not always correct important basic errors in pupils' work, limiting their progress and knowledge of how to improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is inadequate.

- Pupils are introduced to a wide range of texts including poetry, fiction and non-fiction. However, too little attention is given to teaching the basic skills of literacy systematically, including phonics and early reading, by the end of Key Stage 1. Weaknesses in subject knowledge and understanding of the new reading scheme have limited the impact of recent developments in reading.
- The curriculum is more effective at Key Stage 2 where teachers make good use of modern technology and drama to motivate pupils. Pupils respond well to this approach and make better progress. In other classes, teachers use published schemes of work which are not well adapted to meet the needs of the mixed-age classes.
- The promotion of literacy across the curriculum is weak. There is very little consistency of expectations, presentation of work is poor and marking does not aid pupils' understanding of key basic skills such as spelling, grammar and handwriting.

- Pupils benefit from enrichment activities, such as the school plays, a 'fun with phonics' session and regular class assemblies. Planned intervention sessions have been affected by a high level of staff absence.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is satisfactory.

- Since your appointment in September 2011, you have monitored English well. You have evaluated staff performance and accurately identified relevant priorities for improving the quality of teaching. You have a strong, and clear vision for English. There is an awareness that attainment is too low by the end of Key Stage 1 and that pupils' progress is not yet good enough.
- Recent positive developments include new high-quality resources for reading and a new library. The development plan for English focuses on the right issues.
- Pupils' progress has been slowed by severe disruption to staffing over a number of years. This is unresolved and is limiting progress in improving the quality of teaching in English. Although you and the new seconded deputy headteacher know what needs to be done, much rests on developing a strong staff team to realise your plans.
- Governors and the local authority are aware of the significant issues the school faces in raising the quality of teaching in English. The local authority has seconded an assistant headteacher from a neighbouring school to take up the position of deputy headteacher and provided consultant support in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Both governors and the local authority testify to the positive impact of your leadership in improving pupils' progress in English, particularly by the end of Key Stage 2.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising achievement, especially in reading by the end of Key Stage 1 by:
 - resolving the disruption to staffing that is limiting pupils' progress
 - implementing the new schemes of work for phonics and reading systematically across the school
 - ensuring that the curriculum places sufficient emphasis on improving pupils' skills in reading, writing and spelling
- improving the quality of teaching by ensuring that all teachers:
 - implement a revised, systematic approach to teaching phonics and developing pupils' reading skills across the school
 - use questioning effectively to deepen pupils' understanding
 - set tasks which match pupils' learning needs well, especially the more able pupils

- identify, and give pupils time to correct, basic mistakes in their work.

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

Gill Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector