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Mr J Bailey
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Dear Mr Bailey

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 28 June 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.

- Prior attainment on entry to Year 3 of pupils now in Year 6 was broadly average. Externally moderated results for Year 6 pupils in writing for 2012 show above average attainment, demonstrating good progress. The proportion gaining Level 5, places the school in the top 25% of primary schools.
- Pupils' listening and speaking skills are particularly well developed. Year 6 pupils, for example, explained that they were working on 'thought-provoking concept poems' that had grown out of their discussion of life as a journey. They showed considerable maturity in comparing the impact of different pieces of writing.
- Girls' attainment is higher than boys'. Boys' progress in writing, however, is significantly above average, narrowing the gap. All pupils on the school action plus programme or known to be eligible for free school meals achieved Level 4 in 2011, outperforming similar pupils nationally.

- Attainment and progress in Years 3 and 4 are improving but less rapidly. A thorough review of pupils' learning has led to a vigorous drive to improve spelling. Regular phonics and spelling sessions, complementing daily guided reading, are having perceptible impact and more rigorous monitoring is helping all pupils to make good progress. Scrutiny of books and observation of work in lessons confirmed that pupils' technical skills often lag behind their thinking and their readiness to experiment with language.
- Pupils' are enthusiastic and responsive learners, keen to live up to their teachers' expectations. They work well in groups, confidently sharing ideas and supporting each other.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- Teachers successfully present learning as a shared activity, encouraging pupils to develop ideas and extend their skills. Their subject knowledge is good and persuasively communicated. They share their pleasure in reading. They draw on pupils' experiences to link learning in the classroom to life beyond school. Year 3 pupils, for example, saw constructing an enticing leaflet for their small seaside town as a 'real' project not simply an exercise in persuasive writing.
- Expectations are high and tasks are, on most occasions, both challenging and well adapted to pupils' varying abilities and ways of working. A combination of one-to-one tuition, small-group teaching and effective in-class support ensures that those who find any aspect of English difficult are well supported. Teachers use effective questioning skills well to check and extend pupils' understanding.
- Teaching is less effective when it limits pupils' scope for independent thinking and their freedom to make choices about how to tackle a theme. When teachers tell pupils how an idea is to be developed it implies that there is one 'right' way, and this is reinforced by worksheets that set out the steps to be taken. Marking of work usually combines encouragement with guidance on how to improve but its impact is not always evident.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is outstanding.

- The curriculum is developed through themed projects, each leading to a pre-determined event. Pupils' learning about Victorian England, for example, is shaped by the idea of innovation, makes connections between Victorian engineering, exploration, social history and culture, and leads to their own Great Exhibition. This cross-curricular approach develops skills in reading, evaluating evidence, discussing interpretations and presenting findings in different ways, including newspaper pages, PowerPoint presentations, stories and poems.

- Pupils are encouraged to experiment with a variety of media, including puppetry, animation and film-making. For example, pupils composed a prologue and epilogue for *Macbeth* presented as a filmed puppet show.
- Speaking and listening lay down firm foundations for writing. Older pupils value the thinking and problem solving promoted through the 'philosophy for children' approach, a strand woven through all their learning. A Year 6 pupil remarked, 'Being able to ask open questions makes you think. You share ideas.'
- The mainstream curriculum is very successfully extended through work with practitioners, links with local people, trips and expeditions, and regular activities such as the writing, reading and journalism sessions.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

The effectiveness of leadership and management in English is good with outstanding features.

- Improving achievement and pupils' evident enjoyment of learning reflect the high expectations you communicate and the brisk pace you and your deputy set in driving improvement. The subject leader's clear and practical appreciation of development priorities is evident in her contribution to curriculum development and her support for colleagues through modelling of good practice, collaboration with advisers from the local authority and links with other schools. Transition arrangements with the infant school are particularly enterprising and effective.
- Perceptive assessment of teachers' strengths and areas for development sets well-directed priorities for whole-staff training and targeted coaching.
- Some unevenness in teaching and learning remains but the school's capacity for further improvement in English is strong.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- allowing greater scope for pupils to be independent and to make choices about approach and style, especially in their extended writing
- ensuring that marking is consistently effective.

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