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Mr A Hodkinson
Principal
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Dear Mr Hodkinson

Ofsted 2012-13 best practice study: Journey to excellence in English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 2 and 3 May 2013, to look at work in English.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our publication about best practice in English. The publication will include case studies about individual providers. If your school is included as a case study, you will have an opportunity to comment prior to publication. Individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence gathered during the visit included: discussion with you and your senior team and with staff and pupils; observations of seven lessons and an assembly, all with the Vice Principal; review of relevant documents; and scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work from each class.

Features of good practice observed

- A 'can do' approach and a culture of mutual respect and support shape all aspects of teaching and learning. The school's success in providing challenge and enjoyment as well as support to pupils across a very wide spectrum of ability and learning styles stems from a particularly well-balanced distribution of leadership and management responsibilities. As Principal, you present an ambitious and persuasive vision for the school's continuing growth as a centre of excellence, which you underpin by skilful exploitation of development opportunities and sources of funding. The Vice Principal leads a strong team of teachers and support staff, responsible for monitoring the quality and impact of teaching, tracking pupils' progress and ensuring that all staff benefit from opportunities to improve their professional skills.

- The curriculum combines styles of learning in a creative way, drawing on music, art, role play and imaginative use of modern technology to engage pupils' interest in language and communication. It meets National Curriculum expectations that pupils should encounter high quality writing, including poetry, fiction and non-fiction. Whole-school themes have texts at their core, presented in ways that challenge and engage all groups. Myths and legends, for example, are explored in 'Super heroes and villains' and 'Fruit Tastic' brings in stories from other cultures. Reading for pleasure as well as for information is a key element in each day's activities. An assembly built around *The Hungry Caterpillar* demonstrated how effectively music, mime, story-telling and information and communication technology could involve everyone in exploring the life cycle of the caterpillar and in enjoyment of the language.
- The school has designed and developed what it calls the Interactive Zone. In this uncluttered space, pupils across the school's very wide age and ability range use an interactive floor and walls with light beams, music and speech to extend and test their knowledge and understanding and to explore environments and experiences that would otherwise remain far beyond their reach. They respond with excitement and a sense of personal achievement when able to take control of their surroundings in an independent and creative way. Key Stage 2 pupils, for example, who were reading *My Grandma Went To Market*, sat on the flying carpet outlined on the interactive floor, read about and then were transported - virtually - to the countries where Grandma bought her items. They were able to hear music from each country as they looked at and counted the images they themselves had selected and projected by manipulating the light beams. This inspired several pupils to read texts they were unfamiliar with and to tackle challenging words linked to the story being explored in the Zone.
- The curriculum works across a four-year cycle, to give the flexibility needed to support pupils' widely differing pace and style of learning, to ensure progression from one key stage to the next and to avoid repetition.
- Amongst the school's examples of excellent practice is its provision for students preparing for the world of work. These students continue to study essential skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, with opportunities to gain qualifications that will serve them well when they leave school. Confidence to use their communication and language skills beyond the classroom is developed through work experience in which they take on considerable responsibility for projects such as the school's shop in the village and a workshop on a local farm. Speaking and listening, reading and writing are given a context that is motivating and rewarding.
- A combination of passionate commitment and well-grounded professional skills ensures that teaching is never less than good and is often outstanding. Teachers and support staff are well-informed about and sensitive to their pupils' potential and needs. Lesson plans are built around

individuals' learning patterns, with activities carefully matched to pupils' stage and style of learning. In all classes, teachers and support staff pay close attention to pupils' ability to match letters to sounds, to piece together unfamiliar words and to read and to construct sentences. Very occasionally, opportunities to stretch the thinking of the more able are not fully developed; for example, to prompt pupils to ask 'Why?' about a piece of information they have just read or heard. Teachers also need to ensure that in their own writing they are scrupulously accurate over punctuation, spelling and grammar.

- Pupils take pride in their ability to read, whether it be printed text or a sequence of images standing in place of words, and are keen to do well. A Key Stage 2 pupil reflected the feelings of many when he wrote: 'Literacy is one of the greatest lessons – it's entertaining and it really gets your brain working!'

An area for development, which we discussed, is:

- ensuring that teachers and support staff consistently model best practice in their own writing.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop English in the school.

As I 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. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector