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8 July 2013

Mrs A Cruickshank
Headteacher
Arboretum Primary School
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Dear Mrs Cruickshank

Ofsted 2013–14 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 2 July 2013 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 you and your subject leader; your deputy headteacher; staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; observations of six lessons and a learning tour of Key Stage 1.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English is good.

- Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills in communication and language and literacy well below those expected for their age. Most have English as an additional language and many are new to speaking English. Although relatively few reach the levels expected by the time they enter Key Stage 1, they make good progress overall. This is because of the welcoming learning environment, teachers' high expectations and well-established support systems.
- Standards in reading and writing are below national averages at the end of Key Stage 1 and 2. However, the school's relentless focus on English has resulted in steady and consistent improvement over time. During the current academic year, progress in reading and writing across the school has accelerated further. Inspection evidence confirms the school's view that more pupils will attain the national expectation for English at the end

of Key Stage 2 this year than in previous years. The gap between what pupils achieve at Arboretum and nationally is narrowing. However, too few pupils reach the higher levels in reading and writing at the end of Key Stage 1 and 2.

- Last summer's Year 1 screening in phonics (linking letters with the sounds that they make) showed that pupils were doing better than average. This is due to effective teaching and the opportunities provided for pupils to apply their skills in different contexts and across subjects.
- Groups of pupils, such as those with special educational needs, those who qualify for additional government funding (Pupil Premium) and those who arrive in school at different times with little or no English, make good progress. This is because the school has rigorous assessment systems and effective early interventions are well matched to the needs of pupils.

Teaching in English is good.

- Teachers and teaching assistants have good subject knowledge, especially in phonics and early reading. These lessons are planned carefully to take account of pupils' different abilities. Teachers use a range of resources such as puppets, magnetic letters, visual charts and a variety of writing materials including digital technologies. This keeps pupils engaged and ensures a brisk pace to lessons. However, occasionally, errors go unchecked.
- There are examples of highly creative teaching. In one lesson, younger pupils were studying a topic on mini-beasts. Some pupils, including two pupils new to the school, were eagerly using magnifying glasses to observe and draw mini-beasts on the field. Other activities involved pupils in: recording observations on lap-tops; recording spoken observations; writing letters to a Zoologist; researching independently and writing key facts to share with others. As a result of such well-planned lessons pupils become effective communicators and confident readers and writers.
- Teachers make good links between speaking and listening and writing across all subjects and this is having a positive impact on raising pupils' achievement in writing. There are, however, instances when pupils' responses to questions are accepted too readily and pupils are not challenged to think more deeply. In a few lessons, tasks set for more-able pupils are not well matched to their abilities. This prevents them from reaching higher levels in reading and writing.
- Marking is consistently good, with comments that are positive, detailed and evaluative. Pupils talk readily about their targets and their 'next steps' in learning. They have a good understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

The curriculum in English is good.

- The curriculum successfully meets the learning needs of all the pupils. The topic-based approach in the afternoon links English across other subjects effectively and imaginatively. Pupils have many opportunities to practise and improve their skills in reading, writing and speaking and listening in a range of contexts, both formal and informal. This broadens pupils'

experiences of language. Lessons are often planned around the work of some of the best-loved children's authors. As a result pupils talk readily about their favourite poets and poetry and about high quality, challenging children's literature. The school recognises the need to further embed pupils' understanding of the patterns and grammars of Standard English. Strategies to introduce the new grammar test in Year 6 have been used wisely to support work in this area across the school.

- The school frequently invites visitors, such as theatre groups, artists and popular children's authors, to come into school to talk and work with pupils. Pupils value these events. The school also offers a wide range of rich opportunities on a daily basis to enhance English. These include: reading tents on the field where older pupils choose to read to younger ones, communication spaces around the school where pupils go to read, talk and listen to each other, poetry swaps and book swaps. These activities raise pupils' achievement and deepen their enjoyment of English.

Leadership and management of English are good.

- Leaders are passionate about English and determined to continue to raise standards for all groups of pupils. They make good use of accurate assessment and detailed monitoring data. They frequently check all interventions and individual support and they are quick to make changes if necessary. There is clear evidence that standards are improving across the school and there is a good capacity to build on this in the future. The school is rapidly expanding in size as numbers on roll increase. The headteacher has good strategies in place for extending leadership of English and ensuring continuity of improvements.
- The action plan for English is detailed and clearly linked to the school improvement plan. Actions are carefully monitored and are driven by the difference they are making to pupils' progress. The English leader shares her own outstanding practice across the school by modelling, coaching and team teaching. All staff have opportunities to learn together through professional development programmes, links with other schools and action-based research. This enhances the ethos and climate of learning across the school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that more pupils attain higher levels in reading and writing by checking that tasks set for more-able pupils are matched well to their abilities
- developing teachers' use of effective questioning to check pupils' understanding and rate of progress.

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

Marilyn Mottram
Her Majesty's Inspector