

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



2 December 2013

Mrs J Hills
Headteacher
St Mary's Church of England Primary School
School Lane
Amersham
Buckinghamshire
HP7 0EL

Dear Mrs Hills

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 14 November 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 staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English is good.

- The attainment of pupils in Year 6 in 2013 was above average in reading and writing. The proportion of pupils gaining Level 5 in reading and in the grammar, punctuation and spelling test was significantly above that seen nationally.
- Across the school, reading skills are particularly well developed. Systematic teaching of letters and the sounds they make (phonics) in the Reception class and in Key Stage 1 helps pupils to read unfamiliar words. Older pupils read regularly with their teacher in small 'guided' groups. Teachers ensure that pupils continue to read widely as they progress through the school.
- Although standards in writing are above average by the end of Year 6, pupils generally make less progress in writing than in reading. Writing continues to be a focus for improvement across the school. Actions taken

by the school in the last year have led to improvement in pupils' ability to sustain their writing but, in some classes, pupils do not get enough opportunities to write in literacy lessons.

- The achievement is variable of disabled pupils, those with special educational needs and those eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding). The school provides a range of effective support programmes for these pupils outside the classroom, but the activities that teachers plan in day-to-day lessons do not always meet their needs precisely enough.
- Pupils have good speaking and listening skills. They are eager to contribute to discussions and speak clearly and confidently in lessons. They say they enjoy reading aloud in assemblies and performing in shows.
- Pupils have good attitudes to learning and enjoy their literacy lessons. They show that they can work independently or as part of a group and share resources readily.

Teaching in English is good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and most teach all aspects of English with confidence. Their questioning engages all groups of pupils well. In reading lessons, teachers encourage pupils to respond to books and express their opinions.
- The use of 'must', 'should' and 'could' learning targets is embedded across the school. Teachers ensure that pupils know what they should achieve in lessons and many encourage their pupils to stretch themselves with more challenging work.
- The quality of teachers' marking is inconsistent. All teachers mark pupils' work regularly, but they do not always give guidance to pupils about how to improve their writing. Pupils say that some teachers do not give them time in lessons to complete corrections or respond to comments.

The curriculum in English is good.

- The curriculum is well balanced and pupils have opportunities to read and write stories, poems and non-fiction texts. Teachers ensure that, where possible, pupils write for a real purpose. Pupils say they enjoy writing letters to their pen pals in a London school and debating issues affecting the local community, such as the proposed high-speed rail link.
- The curriculum is enhanced through a good range of clubs and activities. Pupils also benefit from regular theatre visits, visits from local authors and a drama club. Older pupils can join the 'Animates' club and create an electronic school newsletter.
- The school's annual book week is an important event and is used effectively to promote reading and writing. This year, pupils created non-fiction text books on the Tudors.

Leadership and management of English are good.

- Over the past few years, the subject leader has ensured that consistently good practice in the teaching of reading has become embedded. School leaders and managers have invested in a wide range of resources for reading, so that even the youngest pupils have access to a large selection of high-quality books in the infant library.
- Careful analysis of the strengths and weaknesses in pupils' written work led to changes in the way that writing is taught and to some improvement last year. However, efforts to drive up rates of progress in writing continue.
- The subject development plan for English lacks sharpness and without clear, measurable short-term and long-term targets it will be difficult for the subject leader to judge the impact of her work.
- Regular checks on teaching, planning and pupils' work are used effectively to set priorities for whole-staff training and professional development.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- planning activities in lessons that match the needs of all groups of pupils more precisely, particularly those who are disabled or who have special educational needs
- giving pupils in all classes plenty of opportunities to practise their writing skills
- ensuring that marking and feedback to pupils are consistently effective
- sharpening the subject development plan.

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

Melanie Knowles
Her Majesty's Inspector